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1489 . f . 1638 .



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"Bessie put her arm round the child's neck, and kissed her lips in a way which told Belle of the sympathy that was in her heart."—*P. 52.*

BESSIE AT SCHOOL,

REPORT OF THE

STATE OF NEW YORK.

IN SENATE,
JANUARY 1, 1891.

ALBANY:
J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.,
PRINTERS.

BESSIE AT SCHOOL.

BY

JOANNA H. MATHEWS.

"Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

"He that speaketh the truth in his heart."

LONDON:

JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.

MDCCCLXIX.

PRINTED BY BALLANTYNE AND COMPANY
EDINBURGH AND LONDON



TO THE
SUNBEAM OF OUR BRIGHT HOME,
By Sister Gertrude.

PREFACE.

THE author had intended that "Bessie among the Mountains" should close the series; but the entreaties of her young readers for "more Bessie books" have induced the publishers and herself to extend it somewhat farther.

The following gratifying and touching communication is given here in the hope that this may meet the eye of her little unknown correspondent—who has not given her residence—and that she will send word where a letter may reach her:—

DEAR LADY,—I love you for you write such nice Bessie books and I want to see you but I dont kno where you live and papa says I can send this to Mr Carter. Please write a 100 Bessie books Bessie in truble and Bessie in plesure Bessie sick Bessie well and all. But not her

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BESSIE AT SCHOOL.

I.

A SURPRISE.

BESSIE lay fast asleep upon mamma's sofa, for she and Maggie had been with Uncle Ruthven and Aunt Bessie for a long drive ; and the little one, quite tired, had curled herself up among the cushions, and still was nestling there, unconscious of all that was passing.

Mamma thought it a good thing that her delicate little girl could drop off to sleep so easily, and so gain the rest she needed after any fatigue; but wide-awake Maggie thought it rather a troublesome fashion of Bessie's, and wondered that any one who was not *obliged* to do it, could "waste being alive in taking naps."

A

But just now she did not mind this quite as much as usual, for she was sitting on a low stool at her mother's feet, busy copying a letter to Mrs Porter, which she and Bessie had composed together. For Maggie no longer printed her letters and compositions, but wrote them in a large round hand, quite easy to read. But, in order to do it well, she had to pay close attention to her writing; and, since Bessie could not help her, she was contented to have her lie quietly asleep on the sofa for the time. Mrs Bradford was leaning back upon the pillows in her easy-chair, looking so pale and thin and weak, that even a child could have told that she had been ill.

Indeed she had been, the dear precious mamma,—so ill, that, for some days, it seemed as if she were to be taken from her little ones. But the merciful Father above had heard and granted the prayers of all the loving hearts whose earthly happiness she made, and hope and joy came back to the pleasant home from which, for a time, they had flown away. It had been a great delight to Maggie and Bessie to see her walk into the nursery, leaning on papa's arm, that morning; and even baby Annie seemed to know it was something to rejoice at, for she

came toddling to her mamma, and hid her face in her skirts, with a sweet crowing laugh, which was full of joy and love.

And when a little while after, Bessie sat looking earnestly at her mother, with eyes which seemed as if they could not take their fill, and was asked by her of what she was thinking, the answer was—

“I was thinking two things, mamma. One was, what a very great thanksgiving we ought to make; and the other was, how very disappointed the angels must be, not to have you in heaven, after all.”

“Oh!” said Maggie, “I am sure the angels are too glad for us to be very sorry for their own disappointment.”

But though mamma was much better, she was still very feeble, and it was necessary that she should be very careful not to fatigue or excite herself; and the doctor said it would be some weeks, perhaps months, before she would be able to go about her usual duties and occupations.

A book lay upon Mrs Bradford's lap, but she was not reading. She sat watching the busy fingers of her little daughter with a look that was somewhat anxious and troubled.

"There!" said Maggie at last, looking from her letter with a satisfied air, "when Bessie has put her name under mine, it will be done. Do you think Mrs Porter will be able to make it out, mamma?"

"If she does not, I think it will be the fault of her eyes, and not of my Maggie's fingers," said Mrs Bradford, smiling as she looked at the large, plain letters upon the sheet which Maggie held up before her. "That is very well done, my dear; and Mrs Porter will be gratified when she sees how much pains you have taken."

Well pleased at her mother's praise, which she certainly deserved, Maggie carefully laid down her letter until Bessie should be awake to read it, and then came back to mamma's side for a little petting and loving.

"Maggie, darling," said Mrs Bradford pressing her thin hand caressingly on the cheek which nestled against her shoulder, "should you like to go to school?"

Maggie raised her head quickly.

"Oh, mamma!" she exclaimed.

Mrs Bradford had fully expected to see such a look, and hear just such a tone; but she only said, "Well, dear?"

"Mamma, I never could bear it,—*never, never*. Why, I suppose you would not teach us any longer then ; and besides, mamma, strange girls go to school, do they not ?"

"Girls who are strangers to you, you mean, dear ?"

"Yes, mamma."

"Well, yes," said Mrs Bradford slowly, for this was even a greater trial to her than it was to Maggie. "I suppose there would be some girls whom you did not know, but not a great many ; for it would be but a small class to which I should send you. Do you remember that pleasant Miss Ashton whom you saw here one day, just after we came home from Chalecoo ?"

"Yes, mamma ; and we liked her looks so much."

"Well, she is going to have a class of little girls for two or three hours each day. Lily Norris, Gracie Howard, and one or two others whom you know, are to join it ; and she came here to know if I would like you to do so. But I wished still to teach you myself, this winter, and said "no." But now that I have been so ill, I feel that I must give up this pleasure, for it will not do for you to lose so much time. So,

as Miss Ashton has still one or two places to be filled, I think I shall send you to her. You will not find it hard after the first day or two. Miss Ashton is a very kind, gentle young lady; you already know several of your classmates, and with the rest you will soon become acquainted. Miss Ashton's mother is to have a class of older girls, but they will be in another room, and need not interfere with you. With all this to make it easy and agreeable for you, do you not think you will be able to bear it?"

"I could not; indeed, mamma, I could not," said Maggie, making a great effort to speak steadily.

"Not if it would be a great help to your sick mother, dear?"

Maggie swallowed the lump in her throat, winked her eyes very hard to keep back the tears, and answered: "Yes, if it would be that, I could, mamma. I think I would do anything that would be a help to you, even if it did hurt my own feelings dreadfully."

"My own dear little girl!" said Mrs Bradford, tenderly kissing the flushed face which looked up into hers so wistfully. "But I do not believe you will find this as hard a trial as you imagine



Maggie. After the first day or two, I hope you will not only be quite willing to go to school, but that you will really take pleasure in it."

Maggie shook her head very dolefully.

"That could never be, mamma; but I will try not to feel too badly about it. But," with a look at her sleeping sister, "I am glad Bessie won't mind it so much as I will. She'll feel very sadly to know you're not going to teach us any more, but then she won't care so much about the strange girls and the strange school."

Mrs Bradford looked troubled. She had not imagined that Maggie thought she meant to send Bessie to school also, and now that she saw this was so, she knew what a blow it would be to the poor child to hear that her sister was not to go.

"My darling," she said, "we do not intend—your father and I—to send Bessie to school this winter. We think her too young, and not strong enough, and that much study would not be good for her."

Poor Maggie! This was more than she had bargained to "bear," the one drop too much in her full cup. She could no longer choke back her tears, but fell into a passion of sobbing and crying, which her mother found it impossible for

some minutes to quiet. It was only the recollection that her mamma must not be worried, which at last helped the child to conquer it. And it was Bessie who put her in mind of this; for her sobs had roused her little sister, who, waking and slipping down from the sofa, came running to know what could be the matter with her usually merry, cheerful Maggie.

"Maggie dear," said the thoughtful Bessie, "I'm very sorry for you, but you know the doctor said mamma was not to have any *excitement* or 'sturbance, and I'm 'fraid you're making one for her. I s'pose you forgot."

In another moment Maggie had checked her loud sobs, though the tears would not be controlled just yet; and looking from her to her mother's anxious face, a new fear came into Bessie's mind.

"Mamma," she said, looking wistfully up at her mother, "is our Father going to make you worse again, and take you away from us after all?"

"No, my darling; I trust not," said Mrs Bradford. "Maggie's trouble is by no means so great a one as that: is it, dear Maggie? I have just been telling her that she is to go to school

this winter, and she is rather distressed ; but she will soon feel better about it. She will only be away for two or three hours each day, and will soon be quite accustomed to her new teacher and her classmates, and learn to like them."

Bessie looked very sober, and, after a moment, she said, with a long sigh—

" Well, dear mamma, you know it is a very great trial to think you can't teach us now ; but we'll try not to mind it so much as to make you feel ill, and maybe I can help Maggie to get used to the girls and the teacher, 'cause you know I am not so shy as she is, and I s'pose I'll 'come acquainted with them sooner than she will. And if we don't like the other girls very much, we won't mind it when we have each other : need we, Maggie ? " and she took her sister's hand with a tender, protecting air, which was both amusing and touching to see.

So the little one herself was also taking it for granted that, since Maggie was to go to school, she was to go too.

It was only natural, as the mother knew. They had never been separated ; one never half enjoyed a pleasure, unless the other shared it ; and all their childish troubles were made lighter

and easier to bear, because they were together and could give comfort and help to one another; and Mrs Bradford was sure it would be as great a blow to Bessie as it had been to Maggie to know that they were to be parted even for two or three hours each day.

"But I mean to keep my Bessie at home with me," she said, trying to speak cheerfully; "and every day, when Maggie comes back, she will tell us all she has seen and learned; and it will be nice to watch for her, and have some little pleasure ready for her, when she returns to us, will it not?"

"Mamma," said Bessie, struggling with herself, lest she, too, should break down in tears, and so distress her mother, but still speaking with a very quivering voice—"Mamma, you never could mean that Maggie is to go to school without me, could you? You are making a joke, are you not?"

The beseeching voice, the pleading eyes, and trembling lips, went straight to the mother's heart, and would not let her smile at the innocent ending of Bessie's speech.

"I really mean what I say, darling," she answered. "Papa, and I have talked it all over,

and although we know it is hard for you and Maggie to be separated even for a little while, we do not think it best for you to go. You are not very strong, and it would not be well for you to study much for a year or two. If you were with other children, you might try too hard, for you know you do not like to be left behind; and as you can read pretty well now, we think we will let you be a lazy little girl for this winter, and keep you at home to take care of mamma."

"Mamma," said Bessie, earnestly, "you know I'd rather be with you than anywhere, even with my own Maggie; and I only want to go to school on 'count of Maggie's sake. But you have a great many people to take care of you, 'cause papa or grandmamma or one of aunties stays with you all the time; and poor Maggie would be so very lonesome without any of her own people. And, mamma, it seems very queer to want a little girl to be lazy; but if you'd like me to, I'll be so very lazy that Miss Ashton will say, 'Go to the ant, thou sluggard.'"

Mrs Bradford could not help smiling; but she said, "That might do, dear, if Miss Ashton were to teach no one but yourself and Maggie,"

but she would probably think it would not answer to have a little girl in her class who could not do as the others did. She might say it would be a bad example, or that the rest might think it was not fair."

"But, mamma," pleaded Bessie, "don't you think if you told Miss Ashton how very fond Maggie and I are of each other, and how ill she would feel if she had to go without me, it might have a little persuasion for her? You know you were very kind to her when her father died, and maybe she would like to have some gratitude for you."

"I daresay Miss Ashton would be very glad to please me, Bessie; but she has to consider not so much what she would like, as what is right and best to do. However, she is coming here this afternoon for my answer about Maggie, and I will ask her if she can make any arrangement that will do for you. If she can, then we will see what papa says; but I do not wish either of you to think too much about it, lest you should be disappointed in the end."

Mamma talked to them a little longer, trying to persuade them to look on the bright side of this, to them, great trouble; till Bessie, noticing

how weak her voice was, and how pale she looked, asked if she were not tired. Mamma said, "Yes," and that she thought she must rest a while if she were to see Miss Ashton that afternoon.

This was enough for the tender little nurses ; and grandmamma, who had left them in charge, coming in soon after, found Mrs Bradford asleep on the sofa, with Maggie gently rubbing her feet, and Bessie as softly threading her fingers through her mother's hair. But quiet as they were, their thoughts were very busy, and their hearts very full ; and Maggie, contrary to her usually cheerful spirit, had been imagining all kinds of disagreeable occurrences which might happen to her at school, and looking upon herself quite as a little martyr ; and now, as her grandmamma nodded and smiled at her, she was surprised not only to see the traces of tears on her cheeks, but also that her eyes were still swimming ; while Bessie's face wore the piteous look it always did when anything had distressed her. Seeing that Mrs Bradford was fast asleep, and would not be disturbed if her children ceased their loving tending, she beckoned them into their own room, where, sitting down on a

low chair, she lifted Bessie on her lap, and drawing Maggie to her, asked what had grieved them.

Their trouble was soon told ; but grandmamma, having known before that the thing was to be, was not surprised, nor as shocked as Maggie had expected and hoped she would be. Now, perhaps some of you little girls, who know what a happy, pleasant place a school may be, will think our Maggie very foolish to dread it so much ; but those among you who are shy and timid, will have some idea of how she felt. Her fear of strangers was really a great cross to her, and she would even sometimes refuse some offered pleasure rather than be thrown with people whom she did not know. This was one reason why her mamma thought it was better for her to go to school, that, being with other children, might help to rub off this uncomfortable shyness, so troublesome to herself and her friends.

"Mr Porter said once," said Maggie, when Bessie had finished her doleful story, "that God sometimes had to take away our blessings to teach us how much they were worth ; and I'm afraid it's just for that He is punishing me this way, for I don't think I ever knew till now what a great

blessing it was to have mamma teach me, and sometimes I even used to feel a little cross when she called us to our lessons. So I suppose when I was so ungrateful, He thought it was just good enough for me to go to a hateful old school full of strange girls and a strange teacher and everything, and not Bessie to go, nor any one who loves me. Oh, dear! oh, dear!" and Maggie now gave way to the tears and sobs which she had checked before, for fear they should distress her sick mother.

Her grandmamma let her cry for a few moments, thinking it might make her feel better; but when she was quieter, she said gently, "I do not think you are looking at this quite in the right way, dear Maggie."

"How, grandmamma?" asked Maggie, wiping her eyes.

"To look at it as a punishment, dear. I know this is a trial for you, indeed, it seems to you now like a great hardship, though I trust you will learn to feel differently about it. But God does not always send trials as punishments."

"What then, grandmamma?"

"Well, He may send troubles to us to work out some good purpose of His own that we can-

not know of, or they may even be sent as blessings, though we do not see it at the time."

"Oh!" said Maggie, "I suppose that was what Aunt Helen meant the other day when she talked about 'blessings in disguise.'"

"Yes," answered Mrs Stanton; "but do you know what *disguise* means, Maggie?"

"Yes, grandma," said Maggie. "It means to dress yourself up so that nobody would know you; and if my going to school is a blessing, I think it is a *very* disguised one *indeed*."

Mrs Stanton could not help smiling a little, though she was sorry to hear Maggie's rebellious tone.

"Grandmamma," said Bessie, "do you think 'our Father' has a purpose in having Maggie go to school?"

"Yes, dear. We may always be sure that whatever He orders for us is for some wise and holy purpose of His own. It may be He sees this will be good for Maggie, or He may have some work for her to do for Him."

"But I know I could work and study a great deal better at home with my own mamma, and my own Bessie, than I could in a hateful school with a cross, ugly teacher," said Maggie.

"O Maggie!" said Bessie, "Miss Ashton is not ugly. Don't you know we thought she looked so nice and pleasant? And I don't believe she is cross, either, or mamma would not let you go to her."

"No," said grandmamma, "Miss Ashton is neither cross nor ugly; but Maggie is looking at her and her school through the spectacles of discontent, which hide all that is good, and make all that is bad appear far, far worse than the reality. Take them off, Maggie, and look at things with your own honest, cheerful eyes. It may be that the great Teacher above has some lesson for you to learn that you do not know of,—some special work for you to do for Him."

"I don't see how a little girl like me could do any work for Him in school, except to learn my lessons well," said Maggie, "and I could do that at home."

"When you were at Chalecoo last summer, did not the Lord Jesus give you work to do for Him, such as you had no thought of?"

"Yes," said Maggie, softened at once; "and it was a very happy work; and I am very glad He made us of a heart to do it."

"And if you ask Him, darling, He will always

give you a heart to do the work He puts in your way," said grandmamma.

"But, grandmamma," said Maggie, "how could I find work for Him in school?" Miss Ashton would not have children like Lem and Dolly* in her class."

"No," answered Mrs Stanton. "The children you will meet there are all probably more or less well taught; but you may still find something to do for Jesus. But the work which He gives us is not always that which we have chosen or planned for ourselves. It may be that your task will be only that of which you have just spoken; to learn your lessons well, to be obedient and respectful to Miss Ashton, gentle and patient with your schoolmates; yet all may be done for the love of Jesus, and to His glory and praise. There is a lovely hymn which asks that one may be made more careful to please God perfectly than to serve Him much. That means that it is far more pleasing to Him to have us take up cheerfully and gratefully the small duty which lies straight before us, than it is to have us pass that by while we search for some more grand

* Two outcast children that Maggie and Bessie had been very useful to while staying at Chalecoo.

task, or self-sacrifice, which we may choose to think is His work. I can tell you a story of a great mistake which I made in that way once. Would you like to hear it ? ”

The children both assented eagerly and settled themselves comfortably to listen to grandmamma's story.

II.

GRANDMAMMA'S STORY.

"I WAS a good deal older than either of you," said Mrs Stanton, "when the things happened of which I am going to tell you, for I was nearly fourteen years of age; but still the story may interest and be of use to you.

"Up to that time, I had always been taught at home, partly by a governess who also taught my younger sisters, Emily and Bertha, partly by my father, who was a man fond of study, and who took great pleasure in teaching what he knew to others, especially his own children. I was a scholar after his own heart, for I learned easily and with little trouble to myself or my instructors; and I had a wonderful memory, which seldom let anything slip which I had once heard or studied. I was very proud of my ready memory, forgetting that it was quite as much a gift from God as beauty, riches, or any other good thing which He gives to His creatures.

I may say, now, that I was really very forward for my age ; and my father and mother also took great pride in me, particularly the former, who was anxious to show off my learning on every occasion.

“A great many gentlemen used to visit at our house, friends of my father, and men who, like himself, were fond of books and study ; and they used to have long talks on these things. Sometimes they would differ about a name, a date, or some fact ; and often, at such times, my father would call me, and tell me to settle the disputed point. I could generally answer correctly, and then our friends would go on asking question after question, perhaps to find out how much I really knew, perhaps only to amuse themselves with my vanity ; while I, encouraged by my father, who did not know the harm he was doing me, and with my silly little head quite turned by the praise and notice I received, was only too glad to show off all I knew. Indeed, I was quite disappointed whenever any of these friends left the house, and I had not been called upon for any such display.

“When I was nearly fourteen years of age, my dear mother had a long illness ; and as soon

as she was able to travel, the doctors said that she must go away for a year at least. Emily had not been well for some time, and it was decided that she was to go too; while Bertie and I were to be sent to boarding-school during their absence. That was a far worse trial than going to school for two or three hours each day, knowing that your own dear mamma is here for you to come back to: was it not, Maggie?"

"Yes, grandmamma," said Maggie, with a loving glance through the open door at her sleeping mother; "but then, you know, you were such a big girl; and, I suppose, you were not shy, either, if you had so much courage to talk to the grown gentlemen. Grandmamma, I don't think you can know how uncomfortable it is for a child to be shy. Oh, I do wish I could come over it."

"Overcome it, you mean," said grandmamma. "Well, dear Maggie, do you know that I think this very thing which you dread so much—going to school—may help you to do so. And it would be a good thing if it were so, for this troublesome shyness not only interferes with one's own pleasure and comfort, but often with one's usefulness to others. But to go on with my story. Great girl though I was, and bolder,

perhaps, than became my years, the parting from my father and mother was a terrible trial to me, and I shed many bitter tears over it. The thing which gave me most comfort was the thought of all I would do while they were gone, and how I would astonish them with my improvement on their return. I not only meant to study so hard that I should put myself at the head of all my classes, and take most, if not all, of the prizes; but I also begged my father to write out a list of books of history and travels which I might read during my play-hours, and asked to be allowed to take up one or two extra studies. He readily agreed; but my mother shook her head, and said if my time and thoughts were to be so taken up with my books, she feared I would not give much attention to little Bertie.

"Bertie was my mother's great anxiety in leaving home. She was only seven years old; a timid, clinging child, shrinking from strangers, and always wanting to be petted and cuddled by those she loved. She had never been really ill, but she was not strong; and my mother gave her into my special care with so many charges to be kind and tender to her, that I felt im-

patient and half vexed that she should think they were needed. Alas! she knew me better than I knew myself.

“Our parents had secured some little favours at the school for us,—among others, that of a room to ourselves; and this they had furnished comfortably and prettily, so that we might have been very contented and happy there together, if it had not been for my vanity and selfishness; or, perhaps I should say, the strange mistakes I made as to my duty.

“For the first day or two, we were both heart-broken, and I petted Bertie and sorrowed with her; but after that, I turned to my books and had no time or thought for anything else. True, I did not neglect my little sister's bodily comfort; every morning I washed and dressed her with my own hands, and curled her long, fair ringlets; each night I undressed her and tucked her in her bed; nor was it done hastily or impatiently, but with care and patience. But while I was at my task—for so I thought it—of tending her, my book lay open on my lap, and I learned long poems or lists of names and dates, and poor Bertie was never suffered to speak to me. I always had an hour to myself at the time

when I put her to bed, and I might have spent it with her, had I chosen to do so. But, no ; although the little homesick child used to beg me to stay with her and talk of mother, I was always in haste to go to the books which father had marked for me. Many a time when I went up to bed, I found her awake, restless and nervous ; or, if she was sleeping, her pillow and face were wet with tears. During play-hours, she use to hang about me, longing for love and comfort ; but although I never sent her from me, I had no time to give her the petting and sympathy she needed.

“ Saturdays, when we had a holiday, and Sundays, were no better, perhaps rather worse ; for then Bertie was more lonely and homesick than when she was in school, and I was just as busy as on other days.

“ On Sunday mornings we were obliged to go to church and Sunday school ; but in the afternoon, we were allowed to do as we pleased, provided there was no loud laughing or talking. It was my pleasure to attend a Bible-class held by the clergyman of the village, about a mile off ; and much of my time on Saturday was taken up with studying the lessons for the next day. I

knew a good deal of the history and geography of the Bible, and could repeat many a chapter and verse; but to its lessons of humility, ~~and~~ selfishness, and true love to my God and my neighbour, I fear I paid little heed.

"My governess rather objected to my attending this class, which was intended for those who were much older than myself; for she thought I was doing too much, and not taking time enough for rest and play. But, since she did not forbid it, I shut my ears to her advice and took my own way. I believe I honestly thought I was doing right, too; that I was making the most of the opportunities God had given me, trying to please my parents, and to do my duty. And these things were all right in themselves; but the trouble was, I did not take up the duty which lay nearest to my hand. I neglected the simple, easy work which God had put in my way, because I thought it was a trifle. You see, my darlings, I would not stoop to pick up the tiny jewel which lay at my feet, but reached out for that which was more showy and glittering, but less precious in His sight.

"We had been at school about four months, when one Saturday I noticed that Bertie seemed

more dull and languid than usual. I did not wish to see this, but I could not shut my eyes to it. She would not go out to play with the other children, nor would she amuse herself in the house, but sat listlessly about looking pale and miserable.

"'What ails you, Bertie?' I asked at last: 'are you ill?'

"'I want mother,' she answered, with a quivering lip and eyes filling up with tears.

"'Well, four months have gone by,' I said, speaking cheerfully, but carelessly.

"'Four months,' the child repeated sadly, 'and that leaves,'—she counted up on her fingers,— 'that leaves eight more, Margy, before they come home. 'Oh, it is so long!'

"'If you love father and mother so much,' I said, 'I should think you would try to do what would please them.'

"'So I do,' said my little sister, with the great tears now rolling down her cheeks: 'mother told me to be good and mind you and my teachers, and I have. Mrs Horton told me yesterday I was the best little girl in the shool and gave her no trouble, and that she would write and tell mother --'

“‘Oh, yes!’ I said, ‘you are certainly a very good child; but you might improve more if you chose, Bertie.’

“‘I don’t want to improve,’ said Bertie; ‘people are not half so nice when they improve.’

“‘You do not understand what you are talking about,’ said I, half laughing, half vexed: ‘people must be nicer when they improve, because it means to become wiser and better.’

“‘Oh!’ said Bertie, with a disapproving look at my pile of books, ‘I thought it meant to study a great deal.’

“‘You foolish child!’ I answered, rather sharply, ‘there are a great many ways in which people may improve themselves. God gives one kind of work to one, and another kind to another; and the way to please Him, and to improve ourselves, is to do what He gives us with all our might.’

“‘And has not God given you any work to do but studying all the time?’ asked Bertie.

“‘Of course not,’ I answered, ‘or I should do it. When our parents placed us in this expensive school, they meant us to make the most of our time and the advantages they had given us; so that is our duty both to them and to God.’

"I thought myself very wise and important while making these grand speeches to my little sister, but they did not seem to satisfy her.

"'But don't we have a duty to each other, Margy?' she said.

"'Certainly,' I answered; 'but I would like to know what you would be at. I suppose it is I you mean, when you say people are not nice who study a good deal: and I do not see where I have not done my duty to you. Don't I take all the care of you?'

"'Yes,' said Bertie, slowly; 'but, Margy, you never pet me, or tell me stories, or sing to me, as you used to, and I would like it now more than I did then.'

"'So would I *like* it,' I said, 'but that would be play, not work, and I have not time for such nonsense. You must not think I do not love you just as much; and don't talk any more, I have wasted too much time already.'

"Bertie obeyed and was silent, leaning her head against the window-frame with the sad, weary air, while I turned over the leaves of my Bible in search of a verse I wanted; but I could not fix my attention. Bertie's words had made me feel very uncomfortable, and brought back my

mother's last charge to me, 'Margaret dear, take care of my baby, and do not let her want ~~for~~ any comfort or tenderness that you can give her.'

"Had I given Bertie all the love and tenderness in my power? Had I done the work which my mother, ay, and my God too, had put into my hands,—the work that should have been done before I took up any other?

"These thoughts now troubled me so, that I could scarcely study; but I tried to put them from me, saying to myself that I would give Bertie a good petting and tell her a long story on the next afternoon, after my return from Bible-class.

"But the next morning I thought I had found a new piece of work which it was my duty to perform. My Sabbath-school teacher told the class of a poor family, living some distance beyond the village, who were in the greatest need, and asked if some among us could not spare a little to help them. I at once took it up, saying that I would go round among the girls in our school, and see what I could collect. This I did, as soon as I reached home; and each of the teachers and scholars giving more or less, I soon had a nice sum in my

hands. I asked, and obtained permission, to go with one of my schoolmates and take this to the suffering family, after the dismissal of the afternoon Bible-class; and as I sat upon the piazza, counting over the money, I said that I intended to do so.

"Bertie sat at my feet, leaning her head against my knees. She had not been to church or Sunday school that morning, for she seemed so languid that Mrs Horton had proposed she should stay at home.

"‘Oh, Margy!’ she said, looking up at me with pleading eyes, ‘then you will be away all the afternoon. It is such a long walk over to the Hollow! and if you go there after Bible-class, you will not be home till tea-time. I do want you so! couldn’t some one else take it, and wouldn’t you stay with me just this one Sunday?’

"‘Impossible, Bertie,’ I said; ‘I have not missed one Bible-class since we came to school, and hope not to during the year; and you surely would not have these poor people suffering another twenty-four hours when here is the money ready for them?’

"‘No,’ said Bertie; ‘but I thought some one

else could go. I believe I don't feel very well, Margy; and I want you to talk about mother. Oh, Margy! do stay.'

" 'Miss Ruthven,' said one of my school-mates, a new scholar who stood by, 'I intended to join the Bible-class this afternoon; and if you would like to stay with your little sister, I will gladly go with Miss Oliver to carry the money.'

"Now, my conscience not being quite at rest for refusing Bertie's request, I immediately imagined that this young lady meant to reprove or dictate to me; and I answered stiffly—

" 'Thank you, Miss Hart, but I prefer to attend to it myself. When one has undertaken a plain duty, one should not give it up for one's own pleasure.'

" 'Yes,' said Miss Hart, quietly; 'but should we not be very sure that we see clearly what is our duty, and what our pleasure?'

"I took no notice of this, but turned to Bertie with—

" 'You said a little while ago, Bertie, that you were so sorry for these poor people. If we really care for others and want to help them, we must sometimes give up our own comfort and convenience.'

“ ‘ You don’t care for *me*, or want to help me a bit,’ said Bertie, passionately ; ‘ and I am going to write and ask mother if I can’t come to her, even if I do have to sail off in a ship all alone by myself ;’ and then she broke out in tears and sobs.

“ ‘ You know that is not true, and you are wrong and selfish, Bertie,’ I said. ‘ I must go now, but be a good girl and stop crying, and I will talk to you about mother, and tell you a nice story when I come home ;’ and giving her a hasty kiss, I ran down the steps and joined the group who were about starting for the church.

“ ‘ Are you not going with us, Miss Hart ?’ said the teacher who was to accompany us.

“ ‘ I think not,’ she answered.

“ ‘ You had better come,’ I said, not wishing she should think me unamiable : ‘ you have no idea how interesting these classes are and how much one may learn.’

“ ‘ Another afternoon,’ she said, with a pleasant smile : ‘ to-day I will remain at home.’

“ We started on our way, but I was very uneasy. The words, ‘ You do not care for me, or want to help me,’ mingling with, ‘ Do not let my baby want for any care or tenderness you can give

her,' kept ringing in my ears ; and my mother's eyes—how like Bertie's were to them !—seemed looking into mine, as she pleaded for her little pet lamb. I came on slowly after the others, trying to make up my mind that it was *not* my duty to go back and stay with Bertie. Once I turned, and looked behind to see Mary Hart in the seat I had left, Bertie upon her lap, the child's arms about her neck, while she tenderly smoothed her lovely hair. A stranger was giving to my sister the petting and soothing for which she had longed, and which I had denied to her.

"Then came the voice of the teacher—

" 'Margaret Ruthven, why do you not come ? If you want to stay with your sister, go back ; if not, do not keep us waiting.'

"I followed the rest, but my thoughts were all in confusion that afternoon. I was angry with Bertie, with Mary Hart, with the teacher, with every one but myself, who alone was to blame. I could not fix my attention on the lesson, or put the questions and give the answers with which I was generally so ready ; and I was glad when we were dismissed. Still, this did not prevent me from joining Miss Oliver and our Sunday school teacher when they went to the Hollow

It was a long walk; and so much time was taken up in making arrangements for the comfort of the poor family, that it was late before we started for home,—so late that, on our way through the village, Miss Henry stopped at her own house for her father, and both saw us safely home.

“We had been gone five or six hours, and as I entered the hall-door, some of the younger children met me.

“‘O Miss Ruthven! Bertie is so ill! She went to sleep in Miss Hart’s lap this afternoon, and when she woke up, she did not know any one; and the doctor is here, and she is so ill.’

“In an instant, I had flown up the stairs, and was on my knees beside Bertie’s bed. There she lay, her head rolling from side to side, her little hot hands tossing restlessly to and fro. She did not know me; and she moaned, and called for mother, saying that ‘she was all alone, all alone.’

“Ah! my neglected work rose up plainly before me *then*,—the simple, easy work of love which God had put ready to my hands, but from which I had coldly turned away in search of something which I thought nobler and better. Would my parents care, though I gained every

prize in the school, if they came home to find their darling gone, and learned that her last days had been made unhappy by want of love and care? Bessie, do not look so distressed, love. Bertie did not die, though for three weeks all thought that it must end so. Probably all the care and tenderness in the world would not have kept off that terrible illness, but my remorse and misery were as great as though it had all been my doing. I would not leave her day or night, and it was only by the command of my governess that I took any rest. At last a change came, and Bertie was out of danger: but she was fretful and nervous, and could not bear me out of her sight; while I felt that I could not do enough to make up for the past, and devoted my whole time to her.

“ ‘Margy,’ she said one day, as I sat beside her, telling stories for her pleasure, ‘I am glad you don’t improve any more. You are just like my old Margy.’ ”

“So the long summer days passed away, and the exhibition, where I had so hoped to excel all my schoolmates, was drawing near: and I stood, *for absence*, at the very foot of all my classes. *Still I hoped* to make up for lost time. When-

ever Bertie slept, I took my books, and did my best to keep up with my class. A night-lamp was burned in our room; and after the rest of the house was safely in bed, I used to rise and study by its faint light, then take a few hours of sleep, and be up with the first streak of day, spending many an hour over my lessons when I should have been at rest. In this way, I hoped to recover what I had lost, and be able to take my old place by the time Bertie was well. But again I found that God had other work for me than that which I had laid out for myself.

“For some days I had felt a great deal of pain in my head, and a burning and throbbing in my eyes, which might have told me that I was doing myself harm; but I would not yet heed the warning, or speak of it to any one, lest I should be forbidden to pore over my books. But now it could not longer be hidden. I woke one morning in such agony, and with such a dimness over my sight, that, though Bertie was still weak, I was obliged to call her, and send for help. My governess came, and then the doctor, and, though I could not see his face, the grave tones of the latter, and the directions he gave, told me that it was a very serious matter.

"And so, indeed, it proved. Day after day, and week after week, I lay in a darkened room, suffering terribly, and in danger of losing my sight for ever. The exhibition was over, the long vacation gone by, before I was about again, and the poor eyes, which had been so sorely tried, were able to bear the light. And there was worse, or what I thought was worse, still to come. My own sense, as well as the doctor's orders, told me plainly that all use of my eyes must be forbidden for some time. 'How long?' I asked the doctor.

"'For months, perhaps years,' he answered, bluntly.

"You may think what a blow this was to me; but after my first sorrow had passed away, I amused myself by forming new plans. If I could not distinguish myself in one way, I would in another. I would do so much for other people, that every one would love and honour me. I had plenty of money, for my father gave me a large allowance; and I would look after the wants, not only of the poor family of whom I have before spoken, but of many more down in the village. They were a miserable, neglected set, there; but I would alter all that. I would

spend my savings for them, and show them how to be neat and comfortable: with my governess's leave, I would gather the children together, and teach them all I could without the use of my eyes; and I did not doubt, that, in a short time, I should work a change that would surprise and delight all who saw it, and be greatly to my own credit and glory.

"Ah! there was the trouble. I thought I would serve my Master, and let my good works be 'seen of men;' but I fear it was to glorify myself, not Him, and so he He did not will that my little light should fall upon the path which I had chosen for myself.

"All these plans and purposes came to nothing, as my former ones had done. I was not only forbidden to read, write, or study, but also to fatigue or exert myself in any way, and indeed, I soon found that this was necessary. Walking to the village was not to be thought of. One quarter of the distance brought on the old, terrible pain, and I was forced into quiet by the dread of blindness.

"So I was to be laid aside as useless, I thought; and I fretted myself, and others, till those about me had good reason to think that the work I had

now chosen was to make myself as disagreeable as possible. It was in vain that my governess told me how wrong and sinful I was ; I could listen to nothing but the murmurings of my own discontent and disappointment, and refused to look at the blessings which God had left me, or to learn the lesson He was teaching me.

“ Thus the rest of the year passed away, and my parents came home, to find me, not the proud, triumphant scholar I had hoped to be, nor yet the beloved and useful benefactor who had gained praise and gratitude from all who knew her ; but a restless, moping, fretful invalid,—a burden to herself and all around her.”

“ But, grandmamma,” said Maggie, as Mrs Stanton paused for a moment, “ you did not tell us what work it was God had left for you.”

“ To learn a lesson of patience, humility, and submission to His will, Maggie ; lessons which I was long in taking to heart, and which I had sadly needed. It was long years before my health and the use of my eyes came back to me ; not till I had learned to be contented with the simple every-day duties which God had meant should be my lot in life. What I wished, was to do great things and serve my God and my fellow-creatures

in a way that should be 'seen and known of men;' but our Father knew that this would not be good for me; that the pride and vain glory, which were my chief faults, would only be strengthened and made worse if He allowed me to go on in the paths I had chosen. I can see this now for myself, and bless Him that He put out His hand and led me by the quiet ways where I have learned to find all my duties and my happiness. But look ! There is dear mamma awake, and the duty I see plainly before us now, is to go and give her some beef-tea and jelly which I think she needs."

III.

SCHOOL.

"BUT, grandmamma," said Maggie, when her mother had been bolstered up, and was enjoying her nice soup, "I do not think waiting on mamma is a bit of a duty; I think it is a great, great pleasure."

"So do I, Maggie; but a pleasure may be a duty: may it not?"

Maggie looked doubtful.

"I don't quite see how, grandmamma. I thought a duty was something one ought to do, but did not quite want to do,—like forgiving people when they were unkind to us, or putting away my playthings when I would rather leave them; or—or—trying to have a cheerful mind about going to school, 'cause it's a help to mamma;" and Maggie smiled a wistful, half-tearful little smile, which went straight to the *hearts* of her mother and grandmother.

"But even a disagreeable duty may bring its own pleasure and satisfaction with it, darling, if we only go about it in the right way," said Mrs Stanton; "and there is many a pleasant thing that is also a duty. You say you love to wait on your mother; but suppose you did not like it, would it be right for you to refuse to do what you could for her?"

"No, indeed," answered Maggie, promptly.

"Mamma seems to like that jelly very well," said grandmamma; "but is there no other reason why she should take it?"

"Yes," said Maggie, "because the doctor said she must eat everything that would make her strong and well."

"So, then, you see a pleasant thing may be as much a duty as a disagreeable one. Right is right, wrong is wrong, and duty is duty; and we cannot alter that, however it may affect ourselves. Only we must try, as I meant my story to show you, to do *first* the duty that is plainest and which lies nearest to our hand, for that is God's work, and the thing He means us to do."

Bessie had been listening very thoughtfully to all that passed, and now she said gravely—

"Grandmamma, I suppose you mean me to

take a lesson of your story, and to understand that if it is Maggie's duty to go to school and study, it is mine to stay at home and *not* study much, 'cause mamma wishes it. So one way is *her* duty, and another way is *my* duty."

"I did not mean the story more for one than for the other," said Mrs Stanton, smiling; "but I am glad you want to learn something from it, dear; and I think you are right in saying that your duty lies in one way, and Maggie's in another. See who is knocking at the door, Maggie."

It was Patrick to say Miss Ashton was below; and he was told to ask her to walk up, while the children were sent from the room, that mamma might be at liberty to talk to her.

Miss Ashton did not stay very long; but it seemed to Maggie and Bessie an age, as they sat upon a hall chair, and waited for her to come from mamma's room; so that, as Maggie said, "They might see if her look had any good news for them."

Not only her looks, but her pleasant voice also, brought good news to them; for, as she met the two wistful faces which gazed up into hers, she stopped and said, smiling, "So I am to have two

dear little scholars from here, instead of one, if your papa will consent."

Instantly every corner of Maggie's face brightened into smiles and dimples; while Bessie, slipping off the chair, seized upon Miss Ashton's hand.

"Oh! could you, Miss Ashton? could you, really?" she exclaimed.

"Could I what? Agree to take a loving little girl with her sister, and teach her just as much as her mother thinks it best for her to learn? Well, I think I shall try and see how it will work."

At this Maggie too came down from the chair, and took Miss Ashton's other hand.

"I am so very much obliged to you, ma'am," she said, too much delighted to remember that the lady was almost a stranger to her.

"Yes," said Bessie, "you can't know how very much we thank you, 'cause you don't know how much accustomed Maggie and I are to each other."

"And I hope you will soon both become accustomed to me, and learn to love me," said Miss Ashton; and then she kissed them, and telling them she hoped to see them at school on

the next Monday, she went away ; and the children ran back to their mother's room to make very sure that the good news was true.

"Yes," mamma said, "it had all been arranged." Miss Ashton was very kind, and said she would give Bessie lessons by herself, if she were not able to keep up with the rest of the class, and she might amuse herself quietly during the rest of the time ; and nothing now remained but to hear what papa thought of this new plan. Only one promise mamma said she would require ; and that was, that when the weather was such that she did not think it best for Bessie to go out, Maggie should go alone cheerfully. Maggie readily agreed, and when papa came home and said, since mamma and Miss Ashton thought it would do, he should make no objection, the two little sisters were so happy in the arrangement which kept them together, that even Maggie had no room for dread of the new school and new faces.

So on the next Monday morning, there were two serious, but not sad, little damsels who stood one on each side of mamma, ready hatted *and cloaked*, waiting till papa should give the *word to start* for school. Serious, for this was a

grave and important matter to them ; quite a new step in life, and to Maggie a very trying one. Still, Bessie was with her, so she could bear it.

Mr Bradford gave the word, and their mother was hugged and kissed, as though the parting were to be for a month, instead of three hours, and they went away. Mamma had bidden them good-bye very cheerily, and it was as well they did not see the tear or two that rolled down her pale cheek, or how sorrowfully she looked after them, as she thought how she should miss their sweet company during those morning hours when they had been accustomed to be with her. But she knew it was best ; and so, after the way of dear mammas, would not let them see her own regret, lest it should add to their trouble.

Mrs and Miss Ashton lived but a short distance from Mrs Bradford, and in a curious, old-fashioned house that was very different from most city houses. It was only two stories high, but very wide and deep, and away at the back stretched a garden as old-fashioned as the house, with stiff box hedges, gravel walks bordered with white pebbles, a fountain in the centre, and at the farther end two old summer-houses covered with grape-

vines. The two sides which bordered on the street were guarded by a high picket-fence, the third by a low stone wall beyond which were half a dozen vacant building plots; while on the opposite corner, at right angles with Miss Ashton's house, lived Mr Peters, who kept the school which Harry and Fred attended, and his boys were accustomed to use these plots as their ball-ground.

Maggie and Bessie thought it a very remarkable and pleasant circumstance that these two houses standing thus by themselves on one square, should be occupied by the two schools, and it gave them a more home-like feeling to know that their brothers were so near.

Mr Bradford asked for Miss Ashton, and when the young lady came down, he said a few words to her, and then kissing his two little daughters left them in her care. Miss Ashton talked very pleasantly and kindly to them as she led them up-stairs, followed by Jane, who had also come to take off the children's hats and cloaks; but they both felt very homesick as papa walked away, and had no heart to answer her. It seemed worse still when their walking-things were taken off, and Jane went, looking very unwilling to

leave them. Maggie's eyes were full of tears, and Bessie only kept hers back by the help of a feeling that she was there to be a comfort to her sister, and so must not give way.

But things appeared brighter, when Miss Ashton took them into the large, pleasant front room where the rest of the class were assembled. Here were seven little girls, and among them were Lily Norris, Gracie Howard, and Nellie and Carrie Ransom, all looking very happy, and very much pleased to see Maggie and Bessie, and not at all as though school were a thing to be dreaded.

Place was soon found for the two sisters, and they were seated together, with Lily on Maggie's other side, and Gracie by Bessie. Next came the Ransoms. All these six were well acquainted and were glad to meet; but the three on the other side of the room were strangers to them and to one another, and looked shy and uncomfortable, and Bessie, as she talked with her young friends, felt sorry for them, and thought she would speak to them, if she only knew their names and what to say.

Presently Miss Ashton, who had left the room came back with another child, and this

one made the number of the class ten. The last comer was a pale, sad-eyed little girl, dressed in deep mourning ; and she, too, was a stranger to all the others.

"Now," said Miss Ashton, "I shall leave you for ten minutes to become acquainted. Then my mother will come, and we will open school."

"But, Miss Ashton," said Bessie, as the lady turned to go.

"Well, dear."

Bessie hesitated for a moment, for she thought perhaps Miss Ashton would think she was taking a liberty ; but when she saw with what a kind smile she looked at her, she made up her mind to speak. She did so, not boldly, but with an outspoken, yet modest little way, that was all her own.

"You see we don't know each others' names she said ; "and I thought if you was to introduce us, maybe we could be acquainted sooner

"To be sure," said Miss Ashton, smiling. "Thank you for reminding me, Bessie. I not think the first lesson taught here this morning would be one of politeness, to be learned myself."

"Oh, Miss Ashton !" said Bessie, "I

not be so saucy as to say you were not polite. I only thought perhaps you forgot."

"And so I did, dear; but true politeness should teach us to remember all those little things which may make others comfortable, or put them at their ease; and I am afraid we grown people often forget that children need such attentions, as well as those who are older."

Then she introduced them all to one another, and went away.

The four whose names were new, were Belle Powers, Dora Johnson, Laura Middleton, and Fanny Leroy. Belle was the little girl in black, who looked so sad.

"Have any of you looked what is in your desks?" asked Nelly Ransom, by way of beginning a conversation. "Carrie and I were the first here, and Miss Ashton showed us. There's a slate, and a spelling-book, and a drawing-book, and a geography, and lots of things. Lift up the covers and look. She'll let you."

No sooner said than done. Ten low desks were ranged around the room, each with a chair of suitable size before it; and one had been given to each child. Every lid, but one, was raised at

Nellie's words, and little heads were popped within to discover what lay hidden there. This gave food enough for talk; even Maggie had something to say; only one tongue was silent, and that was Belle's.

"I think that is 'Sulky Sue,'" whispered Gracie Howard to Maggie and Bessie, looking over, at the mournful, quiet child. "She'd better turn her face to the wall, till she comes to."

"Oh, don't!" answered Maggie. "She'll hear you;" and Bessie said, "I think she feels sorry about something, and her dress is so black. Maybe somebody of hers is dead."

"Yes," said Maggie; "and I'm really sorry for her. I would go and speak to her, if—if—I only knew what to say."

"I'll go," said Bessie, and rising, she walked over to Belle. *She* did not know what to say either; but she did what was better: she put her arm around the child's neck, and kissed her lips in a way which told Belle of the sympathy that was in her heart.

Then Belle's tears overflowed, and, putting *both her own arms* about Bessie's waist, she laid *her head* against her, and cried silently.

"What is the matter?" whispered Bessie.

"I want my mamma," sobbed the child.

"But you know you'll see her very soon," said Bessie. "We are only going to stay in school a little while, and then we'll go home and see our mammas."

"I'll never see my mamma again," said Belle; "never, never, till I'm dead myself; and I wish God would let me be dead now, only then papa would be all alone, and he says I am all his comfort. But, oh dear! mamma is never there for me to go home to."

At this, Bessie's tears also ran over; and as the other children, drawn by Belle's distress, gathered about them, she pointed to the black dress, and said with trembling lips, "Her mamma."

Then Maggie, forgetting to feel strange, went down on her knees beside Belle, and began to caress her; and Gracie, full of remorse for having called her "Sulky Sue," seized on one of her hands, and began kissing it; while the others stood around in silent pity.

Their sympathy did Belle good. She did not mourn the less for her lost mother, but she did not now feel so lonesome and cast astray as she *had done* a moment since; and lifting her face

with a faint smile struggling through her tears, she held up her lips to Bessie for another kiss, saying, "I love you, you're good; they're all good."

As she spoke, the folding-doors at the end of the room were thrown open; and Miss Ashton appeared, and hurried towards them, rather dismayed at finding her young flock in trouble so soon. It was speedily explained; and Maggie and Bessie felt sure that they should love their new teacher, as they saw how gentle and tender she was with the motherless little one. She did not say much, for Mrs Ashton was waiting to open school; but, after sending the others to their seats, she led Belle to her own chair, which stood before the table in the centre of the room, and lifted her upon her lap, laying her head upon her bosom, and passing her hand over the child's hair and face with a soothing touch which soon quieted her sobs, and made her feel that Miss Ashton was her friend and comforter, as well as her teacher.

The opening of the folding-doors had given to view a second room, where were gathered ten larger girls, from fourteen to seventeen years old; very tall young ladies they seemed to

Maggie and Bessie ; and Mrs Ashton, a grave, elderly lady, in a widow's dress, sat just within the doors, where she could be seen and heard from both rooms. She opened school with a short prayer, and then said a few words to all the children, large and small, telling them she hoped they would be obedient, happy, industrious, and kind to one another.

"Now I would like to hear the names of all these little girls," she said.

The answers came very well until it was Maggie's turn to give hers, but the poor child was in an agony of bashfulness, and could by no means speak. While Mrs Ashton was talking, she had happened to look up, and caught a pair of mischievous, dancing, black eyes fixed upon her from the other room. After that, she could not help glancing up at them every moment or two ; and each time she did so, her colour deepened and deepened, and her head sank lower and lower ; for the owner of the black eyes kept smiling and nodding, making odd faces, and shaking her finger, till Maggie did not know whether to laugh or cry ; and by the time the question came to her, her small stock of courage and her voice were both gone.

"Cannot you tell me your name, my dear?" asked Mrs Ashton.

"Her name is Maggie Stanton Bradford," said Bessie, taking her sister by the hand.

"You should let your sister speak for herself, my dear," said the lady.

"No, ma'am," said Bessie, respectfully, but steadily; "I came to school to be of use and comfort to Maggie, and when she don't want to speak 'cause she feels shy, why she likes me to do it for her, so I have to. And ma'am, you said you wanted us to be industrious; but I'm 'fraid I can't. I have to be rather lazy."

"My dear child," said Mrs Ashton, "you surely do not come to school to be lazy."

"Oh, yes, ma'am!" said Bessie, gravely. "Mamma 'spressly said that I was not to study much, and that was condition that I came to school."

Bessie was growing rather frightened herself at having to speak before so many; but she thought she ought to let Mrs Ashton know how and why she had come to school, and what was to be expected of her; and that she might as well have her say out at once.

The other children were all listening to her in

great astonishment, and some of the great girls in the back room were beginning to laugh. Bessie wondered why they did so, and thought they were not very polite. Mrs Ashton heard her with a half smile, breaking over her pale face, and Miss Ashton was smiling outright.

"Oh!" said Mrs Ashton, "I understand. You are Bessie Bradford. Mary, I think you should make this matter a little plainer."

Miss Ashton said she would do so; and then the doors were closed again, and the business of the day began.

"Now, little Belle," said Miss Ashton, "will you go to your seat?"

Belle clung to her teacher, and whispered something in her ear.

"Belle wishes very much to sit by Bessie Bradford," said Miss Ashton. "How shall we manage it? Will Bessie change her seat, or will Maggie or Gracie give up hers. It is only for to-day; to-morrow, Belle will feel more at home, and that you are *all* her friends."

Maggie had not yet recovered from the effect of the black eyes, although they were now shut from view; and she tightened her hold of Bessie's

son-in-law. As some of the great girls
back room were beginning to laugh,
wondered why they did so, and thought
they were not very nice. Mrs Ashton heart-
ily said she was speaking over her head
and Miss Ashton was smiling at

"I said Mr Ashton, I am disappointed
re Bessie Ashton. May I please you
make the matter a little clearer?"

Ashton said she would do so, and that
there were three other girls in the business
by degree.

Now, Miss Bessie said Miss Ashton, I will
go to your room.

She came to her teacher, and was very
kind in her ear.

She wishes very much to see the girls
and said Miss Ashton, I will do so.

Will Bessie change her name to
Grace or Gracie give us here. I will do so
to-morrow. This will be the first of

hand, feeling that she could scarcely bear to be separated from her just now.

Gracie did not want to give up her seat, either, for she liked to sit by Bessie; but while she hesitated, and Miss Ashton waited, she remembered when they were at Quam Beach summer before last, and went to Sunday school in the barn, Maggie had gone to sit by Mamie Stone, a girl whom no other child would have near her, and with whom Maggie had just had a quarrel. And she thought, if *she* would do so much for a quarrelsome child, who had been unkind to her and her sister, might not she give up her seat to this little, sad, motherless one, who already looked on the dear Bessie as her friend? She had called her "Sulky Sue," too!

Maggie would have been very much astonished if she had been told that the small act of self-denial and forgiveness which she had long since forgotten was bearing fruit now; but so it was, and, jumping up, Gracie said, "Belle may have my seat by Bessie to-day and to-morrow, too, Miss Ashton."

Gracie felt quite repaid when she saw Belle's *grateful smile*, and the comfort she seemed to *take in being close by Bessie*.

Miss Ashton said they would have no regular lessons for that day, as she must first find out how much each one knew, and then arrange their studies; and she told Bessie she thought she had misunderstood her mamma's meaning. She did not wish her to be a lazy girl: she wanted her to be industrious, and try to do well whatever was given her to do; but she had feared Bessie would not be satisfied if she were not allowed to go on as fast as Maggie and some of the others; and *that* she did not think would be wise. When she went home, she must ask her mamma if it were not so.

Then she questioned them all in the multiplication and addition tables, and in geography; made them spell words of different lengths, and heard each child read aloud: after which she said she should divide her class into two; Bessie, Belle, and Carrie Ransom in one, and the rest, she thought, could keep on together. Then she set their lessons for the next day, and afterwards read them an interesting story of a good and wise young prince, who had lived many, many years ago. This was Miss Ashton's way of teaching history; she would read or tell them of some *good or great* person on one day, and, the next,

she would question them about her story, and see how much they remembered.

In fact, she made all their studies interesting : she had such a pleasant, easy way of teaching. For instance, she would say, " Belle, how many are three and three ? "

Belle could not remember.

" Suppose three little girls are going to have a tea-party, you and Bessie and Carrie, and three more, Maggie and Gracie and Lily, come and ask to be invited. If you say, yes, then how many little girls would there be at the party ? "

" Six," answered Belle, promptly : and Carrie said, " But maybe we would be dis'bliging, and say no, and then we would be only three;" at which the other children laughed, and so did Miss Ashton ; but Belle never forgot again that three and three made six.

They learned none the slower for this pleasant, take-it-home-to-one's-self kind of teaching, you may be sure ; and, as the weeks went by, there was not one of the little class whose friends did not find her greatly improved.



"If the day were fine, Miss Ashton would put on Bessie's wrappings, and let her run in the queer old garden, and make acquaintance with the pigeons and peacocks who lived there."—P. 61.

IV.

SCHOOLMATES.

AT twelve o'clock Miss Ashton dismissed her class, and the large girls in the other room had a recess ; but Maggie and Bessie did not go home immediately, for Maggie had a music-lesson to take for half an hour, and her sister waited for her. During this time, she had leave to amuse herself as she pleased ; for Mrs and Miss Ashton soon found she was a child who could be trusted, and that there was no need to watch her lest she should get into mischief.

Sometimes, if the day were fine and mild, Miss Ashton would put on her wrappings, and let her run in the queer old garden, and make acquaintance with the pigeons and peacocks who lived there. Sometimes she would look at a picture-book, or at some shells Miss Ashton would lend her, or draw on her own slate ; and *sometimes* she would be carried off by some of

the larger girls, with whom she soon became a great pet, and who found much amusement in her wise, ladylike little ways and droll sayings. But her great enjoyment was to stand at the windows of the back school-room, which looked out over the garden and vacant plots, and watch the boys at their play.

During school-hours, the doors between the rooms were sometimes open, sometimes shut, as was most convenient; and Maggie was always very glad when the latter was the case, for that pair of black eyes continued to be a great disturbance to her even after she had learned to know and like their owner. This was Miss Kate Maynard, a bright, merry, mischievous girl, full of fun and spirits, which she did not always keep in proper check, so that though she was a generous, kind-hearted girl, she was often bringing herself and others into trouble. More than one lesson had not yet taught her that—

“Evil is wrought by want of thought,
As well as by want of heart.”

It did not enter her mind for one moment that *she* was causing real suffering to that timid *little child* in the other room by her teasing

looks and signs and grimaces. It amused Kate to see how against her own will Maggie's eyes seemed drawn to hers, and how, after every new glance, her blushes grew deeper and deeper, and she fidgeted more and more uneasily on her seat. Katie Maynard would have been shocked at the thought of giving a blow or a pinch to the child, but Maggie would have readily taken the blow to be free from those tantalising eyes. It was "fun" to Katie, and she "did not think" what it cost the little girl.

On this first day at school, Miss Ashton asked Bessie how she would amuse herself while Maggie took her lesson; and the child, who did not yet feel quite at home, begged that she might go down-stairs with her sister. Miss Ashton consented, but said she feared she would find it rather dull; and her words proved true. Bessie stood by in loving admiration while Maggie played over one of the simple airs her mother had taught her; but when it came to exercises, and "one, two, three,—one, two, three," she found it rather tiresome. She wandered around the room a few moments, and then, hearing the sound of laughing and talking in the hall, opened the door, and looked out to

see what was going on. Several of the older girls were there, and as soon as Bessie's little head appeared, they saw and called to her.

"There's Bessie Bradford," said one.

"Oh, you dear little thing!" cried another; "come out here and talk to us."

Bessie hesitated a moment; and then, thinking it might be more amusing talking to the young ladies than to stay quiet and hear Maggie practising, went slowly towards them. In an instant Katie Maynard snatched her up in her arms, and after waltzing gaily through the hall with her, brought her back to the stairs, where she seated herself with her prize upon her knee, and four or five other girls gathered about them.

"How old are you, Bessie?" asked one.

"Six years and a half," answered Bessie; "and when I have another birthday, I'll be seven."

"Here's a cake for you, Bessie," said another.

"No, thank you," said Bessie. "Mamma never gives me cake."

"You'd better have it," said the young lady.

"It is very nice, and there's a big raisin in the *middle*."

Bessie looked longingly at the cake, for she felt rather hungry, and it certainly looked very nice; but she shook her head decidedly.

"No, thank you," she said again.

"Did your mamma forbid you ever to eat them?" said the young lady.

"She did not *say* we must not; but it's just the same," said Bessie; "for she never gives them to us, and I do not think it is a kind of cake she would like us to eat."

"And so you came to school 'to be of use to your sister, and to be lazy,' did you?" asked Kate Maynard.

"I believe I made a little mistake about that," answered the child. "Miss Ashton made me understand it better; and, when I go home, I am going to ask mamma if she is right."

"I don't see how you dared to speak out to Mrs Ashton about it," said Fanny Berry. "Where did you get so much spirit, you little mite?"

"Were you not afraid?" asked Kate.

"Yes, a little. But then you see I *had* to tell her."

"And why did you *have* to tell her?"

"'Cause I was afraid she was 'specting me to do *what* mamma did not want me to do."

"But if mamma had said you were not to play much, would you have been in such a hurry to tell Mrs Ashton?" asked Fanny.

"You need not ask that after the cake," said Kate, before Bessie could speak.

"Are you always so particular about doing as your mamma wishes, whether she knows it or not?" said the young lady who had offered the cake.

"Why, yes," said Bessie. "Are not you?"

At this, two or three of the girls laughed; and Kate Maynard said, "That shoe pinches: does it not, Mary? No, indeed, Bessie: filial obedience and respect are not among Mary Morton's weaknesses."

"Do you mean she don't mind her mamma?" asked Bessie, looking up with astonishment at Miss Morton, who coloured, tossed her head, and then laughed.

"Something that way," answered Kate.

"I am no worse than others," said Mary.

"I don't know," said Kate. "I do not set myself up for being very good, and I own I am not always as considerate and dutiful to my mother as I should be; but I do not think my conscience would give me much rest if I

spoke to her the way you do to your mother, Mary."

"Your conscience need not trouble itself about *my* doings," said Mary, sharply.

"But, Bessie," put in Fanny Berry, anxious to turn aside the threatened quarrel, "suppose your mother told you to do one thing, and Miss Ashton told you to do just the opposite. What then?"

"Course I'd mind my own mamma," said Bessie; "but I don't believe Miss Ashton would tell me to do what mamma did not want me to. I think she is very good and nice, and I am sure she wouldn't want little girls to be disobedient."

"Maybe not," said Fanny. "But suppose she ordered you to do something which your mamma had not forbidden, but of which you were sure she would disapprove: how then?"

"I'd say, 'Please to 'scuse me, ma'am; but 'tis quite impossible.'"

The girls laughed.

"But you are expected to mind your teachers when you come to school," said Kate; "and you promised Mrs Ashton you would be obedient: did you not?"

"Yes," said Bessie, "but"—— she paused, and leaned her cheek thoughtfully on one little hand, while she drew the forefinger of the other slowly over the buttons of Kate's dress. She knew very well how she felt about it herself, and that she was right; but she could not seem to make these teasing girls understand how it was. She had a suspicion that they were laughing at her too; and she began to feel angry, as was plainly to be seen by her rising colour and trembling lip; and Kate who was already sorry for her carelessness in troubling the sensitive conscience and puzzling the thoughtful little head, said coaxingly, "You are not vexed, Bessie?"

Bessie looked gravely at her for a moment; and then, as the angry flush faded away, she answered, "I believe I was going to be."

"And you've changed your mind, have you?" asked Mary Morton.

"I think I ought to be sorrow for you," said the child.

"Why?" asked Fanny.

"'Cause you don't have such wise and good mammas as mine to give you understanding of what is right without bothering little girls like me who don't know the best way to talk

about it," answered Bessie, with an air of grave reproof which was extremely amusing to the girls, who now laughed uproariously.

Bessie tried hard to slip from Kate Maynard's knee; but the young lady held her fast, saying—

"We've caught it now, girls, and served us right too. Sit still, Bessie: you shall not be teased any more."

"You cannot make the two duties agree, eh, Bessie?" said Julia Grafton. "Well, you are not the first person who has been troubled in that way."

The word "dnty" brought a thought to Bessie's mind; and suddenly looking up, with the light breaking over her face, she exclaimed—

"Now I know everything about it: God gave me to mamma for her own little girl, to mind her *first*, and to do everything I know she will like. That is the nearest duty, and I must not let anything put me away from it. But mamma has a great deal of wisdom and care for her children, and if she did not have such trust in Miss Ashton to make us do the things she likes, I know she would not send Maggie and me to her. So we are to mind Miss Ashton all we can, without dis'beying mamma."

"Pretty well reasoned," said Julia; and Kate, giving Bessie a squeeze and a kiss, exclaimed—

"You know a thing or two, do you not?"

"I did not know that of myself," said Bessie. "The other day grandmamma told us a story to show us how we must first do the duty we were quite sure about; and when that young lady spoke about two duties, it made me think how it was."

Her hearers smiled, and looked approvingly at one another; but there was something in the child's simple honesty and innocence which touched even these thoughtless school-girls, and kept them from putting into words their wonder and admiration at the clear, straightforward way in which she had helped herself out of the difficulty into which they, in their love of mischief, had brought her.

Kate kept her word, and did not allow Bessie to be annoyed or teased any more; but her little head was still puzzled by some of the things she had heard these great girls say. She put by these thoughts, however, till she should be able to speak to her mother about them, and chatted away sociably with Kate and the others, till *Maggie had finished her lesson, and Jane came to take them home.*

"There's straightforward honesty and wise simplicity for you," said Kate Maynard, as the front door closed behind the two little girls and their nurse, and the bell rang to call herself and her schoolmates back to their studies.

"She won't be quite so squeamishly truthful and obedient when she has been at school a month," said Julia Grafton.

"I don't know about that," said Kate. "I believe she will. It is easy to see that truth and obedience are not only matters of habit, but matters of conscience with her; and I do not think she is a child whom it will be easy to turn from what she believes to be right."

"Wait till she's tried, and you'll see," said Mary Morton. "It don't do to be too particular at school. One would be in all kinds of trouble."

"I have not generally found that strict truth and honesty were so apt to bring people into trouble, as the contrary," said Fanny Berry, drily, as they entered the school-room.

"Well, my darlings," said mamma, as the two bright faces appeared before her, "you do not look as if school were such a sad affair *after all*."

"Oh, no, mamma!" said Maggie: "it is not sad at all, but a very nice affair. We like it very much, and Miss Ashton is so kind, and teaches us so interestingly. But I like it best when the doors are shut, and the young ladies in the other room can't see me."

"And what does my Bessie say?" asked Mrs Bradford.

Bessie had quite as much to say in praise of the new school, and the little tongues ran on till mamma had been told of all they had heard and seen that morning.

"And, mamma," said Maggie, "I've found out that something was true that grandmamma told me the other day. She said my shyness might stand in the way of my being of good to others; and this morning I found how it could be. There was a little girl whose mother was dead, and she was shy too, and felt very sad; and I wanted to say a kind thing to her, but somehow I couldn't. But Bessie went and spoke to her, and was of great comfort to her; and so I saw what grandmamma meant, and why I ought to try and cure myself of being shy."

"My dear little girl!" said her mother, tenderly; and in her heart she thanked God that

her child was so ready to take to heart and learn the lesson she needed.

Then she asked about the little one who had lost her dear mother; and when she heard that her name was Belle Powers, she said that, when she was a young lady, she had a very intimate friend who had married a gentleman named Powers, and moved away to the South; but for many years she had heard nothing of her; and she now wondered if she might not have been Belle's mother. What made her think so, was, that her friend's own name had been Belle. If it were really so, she would like to be kind to the little child for her mother's sake as well as her own.

Bessie told her that Belle had no brothers or sisters; and how Miss Ashton had said that her papa had sent her to school, thinking that it might do her good, and make her forget her grief to be with other children; and that they must all remember that she was lonely and sorrowful, and be very kind to her.

Mrs Bradford was very sorry for little Belle, and she said the children might tell her to ask her father to let her come home with them some day after school, and have a good play in their merry, happy nursery. Of course, Maggie and

1

Bessie immediately became anxious to have the day fixed, and mamma said, if they were to do a kind thing, it might as well be done at once; so they could ask Belle for the next day but one.

Bessie told her mother of the mistake she had made, and how Miss Ashton had explained it to her; and mamma said their teacher was quite right, and that she should herself have made Bessie understand more plainly what she wished her to do.

"But mamma," said the little girl, "there was one thing that was very strange. Those young ladies in Mrs Ashton's class seemed to think it was very surprising that I told her what I thought you meant me to do, and I almost think they would not have told her themselves; and they troubled me so about minding you, that I hardly knew how it was. I think they might have been doing something better; don't you, mamma?"

Mrs Bradford asked what she meant, and Bessie told all that had passed between herself and the girls.

Mamma said she had answered very well; and that she was glad she knew what was right *herself*, whether she had made the others understand it or no.

"And you were quite right about Miss Ashton, my darling," she said ; " for if I had not perfect confidence in her, and did not believe she would guide and teach my little girls as I would wish to do myself, I should not have put you under her care. And you must try to remember this, dear, if Miss Ashton should give you an order or rule which you think doubtful. Many things which would be right and proper for you at home, would not be best in school ; and, again, that which is wise and necessary in school, would not do at home. In all this, you must let her judge for you, and do as you are bid. Then you may afterwards tell me, and see what I have to say."

"Mamma," said Maggie, "I am afraid it will be harder to be good at school, than it is at home."

"I daresay it will, Maggie: you will probably have some trials and temptations there which you would not have at home. But you must remember, dear, that 'our Father's' strong and loving care is with us in the one place as well as in the other. When temptation creeps in, you have only to ask His help; and He will give you *the strength and grace you need to bid it begone.*

And if we feel we are likely to be tempted, it must only make us all the more watchful, Maggie."

"Yes, mamma," said Maggie: "we must keep our hands all the more closely on the silver thread of conscience, and look all the more at the golden letters on the guide-posts: must we not?"

It was more than a year since Colonel Rush had first told his story of "Benito" to these dear children: but it never seemed to lose its freshness or interest for them; and he often wondered, and was grateful, as he saw how they had taken it home to themselves, making it fit into their own young lives, and of their own accord drawing all manner of sweet and useful lessons from it.

"And, grandmamma," continued Maggie, to her grandmother who was sitting by, "I found out this morning how there could be other work to do for Jesus in school besides studying, and reciting well, and obeying my teachers. I think Bessie was doing His work when she went and comforted Belle; and Gracie did a little bit of *work for Him* when she gave up her seat to *her*."

"Did my Maggie find nothing?" asked mamma.

"I'm most afraid I did not, mamma," said Maggie, slowly; "at least, if I did, it was such a very little thing, it is not worth to speak about."

"But I should like to hear," said Mrs Bradford.

"Well, mamma, Carrie Ransom had a copy-book with a blue cover, and I had one with a pink one, and Carrie liked the pink one best, and I said I would change with her; but it was not a very great thing to do, for I did not care much about the colour."

"But you did it because Carrie cared, and you wanted to be kind to her: did you not, dear?"

"Yes, mamma."

"And Jesus put it into your heart to do it; so was it not His work?"

"Yes, I believe so, mamma; and I remember now grandmamma said it was not so much *what* we did for God, as *how* we did it, and *why* we did it, that made it His own work."

A pleasant surprise awaited Maggie and Bessie that afternoon, while they were out with

the other children and their nurses. Baby Annie was taking her first walk upon the pavement, led by her two proud little sisters, each holding a hand, while nurse followed close behind.

The little one, enchanted with her new performance, was chattering away in her own sweet language, not in the least disturbed by the fact that no one but herself understood it; and Maggie and Bessie were watching, and listening to her in delighted satisfaction, when a pleased voice exclaimed, "Oh, there they are! and a nice baby with them!" and Belle Powers came running up to them. She scarcely looked like the sad child of the morning, so glad was she to see them; and you may be sure she had a kind welcome from her young friends.

"I was just telling Daphne about you," she said, looking round at the old coloured woman who followed her, "and there you came. Was it not funny?"

The other children also thought it a rather remarkable circumstance, but a very pleasant one; and nurse now saying that baby had walked far enough, took her up in her arms, and Belle took her place between the two little girls; old

Daphne, delighted to see a smile on the sad face of her young charge, coming on with the other nurses.

Belle was soon told of mamma's invitation, and readily promised to ask her papa's permission to go home with Maggie and Bessie on Wednesday after school.

"Where do you live?" asked Bessie.

"Over there in that hotel," answered Belle.

"Why, do you?" said Bessie. "My soldier lives there too. He never told us about you."

"Who is your soldier?" asked Belle.

"Colonel Rush: don't you know him?"

"No," said Belle: "I never saw him."

"Why, how very queer to live in the same house, and not to know him!" said Bessie; but Jane, who heard what they said, explained to them that people might live for months or years in that great building, and yet never know more of one another than if they lived in different cities. The children thought this very strange and unsociable; but Belle and the colonel were a proof that Jane's words were true.

"I think we'd better try to bring you acquainted with Uncle Horace and Aunt May," said Bessie; "they'll be very kind to you, I know."

"Did you never see us when we went to the hotel?" asked Maggie. "We go there very often."

"No," said Belle. "But, then, I have not been here very long. I used to live in my home."

"Where was that?" asked Bessie.

"Oh!" in a great deal nicer place than this, far away in the South," answered Belle.

"Oh!" said Maggie, eagerly; "and what was your mamma's name?" she would have added, but suddenly thinking that the mention of her mother might bring back the shadow to that sad little face, she checked herself.

She need not have feared. Her tongue once loosened on the subject of her beloved Southern home, Belle talked away about that and her dear mother in a manner which showed it did her good to speak of them; while her new friends listened with great interest.

"What was your mamma's name?" asked Maggie, at last venturing her interrupted question.

"Her name was Belle, like mine," said the child.

"Oh!" said Bessie, joyfully; "then I think she must have been our mamma's friend."

"How very nice that would be!" said Maggie. "Belle, if your mamma and our mamma used to be friends, won't you be our inseparable?"

"No," said Belle: "I don't think I'd like to be that kind of a thing."

"Do you know what it is?" asked Maggie, rather taken aback at this plump refusal to her friendly invitation.

"No," said Belle; "but it don't sound very nice."

"Oh, I think it sounds so nice!" said Maggie. "It means to be very, very great friends, and to be very fond of each other, and tell each other all our secrets."

"I'd just as lief be, if it means that," said Belle. "I think you and Bessie are very good, and I am going to love you a great deal. But I don't have any secrets. Can you tell me yours if I don't have any?"

"Oh, yes!" said Maggie; "and maybe some of these days you'll have some, and then you can tell us. But Bessie and I always tell our secrets to mamma, 'cause she says it is not right for little girls to have secrets from their mothers."

So the treaty was made, and things proved as the children had hoped they would: for it was made certain that Belle's mamma had been Mrs Bradford's friend of bygone days; and her papa being only too thankful for the interest and sympathy the lady showed for his lonely little child, and that Belle should have as companions and playmates our well-behaved and ladylike Maggie and Bessie, the three children became very nearly what Maggie had desired—"inseparables."

V.

THE PRIZES.

MAGGIE and Bessie had been going to school about a week, when one morning Miss Ashton said she wished all her little scholars, except Bessie, Belle, and Carrie Ransom, to write a short composition for her. This was received with some very long faces, and a good many ohs ! and ahs ! of which Miss Ashton took no notice. Maggie and Gracie were the only two who seemed to be pleased with the prospect. Maggie, as we know, had been accustomed to composing a little. Her "History of the Complete Family" had been of great use to her in this, as well as her habit of writing letters to her friends whenever she found an opportunity. So she looked upon Miss Ashton's order more as a pleasant pastime than as a task ; and she and Gracie Howard, who was also a good writer and fond of composition, seized upon their slates and pencils with great satisfaction.

Miss Ashton said each child might take as a subject the history of yesterday, and tell what she had done or what happened to her; that she would give them half an hour, and at the end of that time they must all hand her something, even if it were only a few lines; but she trusted each little girl to do her best.

"Miss Ashton," said Bessie, "could not I make a little composition too? I can't write, but I can print it."

"No, dear," answered Miss Ashton, "you have had enough study for to-day."

"But composition is not study," said Bessie, fretfully; "and I want to do it, if Maggie does. I think I might;" and Bessie's lips looked rather pouty.

"Bessie," said her teacher, "what was the bargain you and I made with your mamma?"

The child's face cleared instantly, and, in her own demure little way, she said, "Oh, I did forget, Miss Ashton! Thank you, for putting me in mind. I'm 'fraid you're disappointed in me to do a thing like that."

"No," said Miss Ashton, smiling: "I do not *expect any of my little scholars to be perfect; and I am satisfied, if when they feel wrong, and*

are told of it, they try at once to correct the naughty feeling. But now we four must keep quiet, and not disturb the others while they are writing. Bring your slates here, and we will have a drawing lesson."

The three little girls soon gathered about her, and, lifting Bessie upon her lap, she made Belle and Carrie stand on either side, and told them they were all to try who could draw the best cow. She would try herself.

In a few moments, the three children had finished; Miss Ashton had done first, and the four slates were compared. There could be no doubt that Miss Ashton's cow was decidedly the best. *That* they had expected, but each child had hoped her own might be the next best. Carrie was not disappointed, her cow was pretty fair; but those drawn by Belle and Bessie were very extraordinary looking animals; Bessie's, especially. In fact, it looked like nothing so little as a cow, and might rather have been taken for a table with four crooked legs going down, and three still more crooked sprawling in the air. The first four were supposed to be the legs of the creature; the last three, her horns and tail.

"Oh, what a cow!" said Carrie: "she hasn't even a head."

Bessie hastily drew a round O for a head, which did not improve the cow, but made her look funnier than ever: and Carrie saying, "What a looking thing!" went off into a fit of laughter.

Bessie flushed up angrily, stretched out her hand towards Carrie's slate, and in another moment the drawing would have been wiped from it, when, before Miss Ashton could speak, she drew the hand back, and said in a gentle but grieved voice, "I did it as good as I knew how."

"Yes," said Belle, firing up in defence of her "inseparable," and casting a scornful glance at Carrie's slate; "and her cow is a great deal prettier than yours, Carrie, and she is a *great deal better* than you."

"No," said Bessie, laying her head with a penitent little sigh against Miss Ashton's shoulder, "hers is the best, Belle: mine is not half so good."

"But you say you did the best you could," said Miss Ashton, tenderly smoothing down the curls on the dear little head.

"Yes, I truly did," said Bessie.

"And, Carrie, did you do your best too?"

"Yes," said Carrie.

"And Belle?" said Miss Ashton.

"Yes," answered Belle.

"So did I," said their teacher; "and none of us can do more."

"I think, maybe, I could make a little better one if I was to try hard," said Belle.

"Then you may all try again; and since you agree that my cow is the best, you can take her for a pattern."

So they all tried to make one like Miss Ashton's. Carrie's was much like her first attempt, neither better nor worse; but in Bessie's and Belle's, a great improvement was to be seen.

Before the half hour was up, Maggie and Gracie had finished their compositions, and laid down their slates, but some of the children were still poring over theirs, having very little written. At last, Miss Ashton said the time was up, and sent Belle to collect the slates, saying she should read the compositions aloud.

Some were very well well done; Maggie's and Gracie's the two best; but with some it was *plainly* to be seen that the young writers had

taken little or no pains. One little girl had written only—

“I got up, and I stayed up till I went to bed. That is all I know.” At which, when it was read out, the other children laughed; but the little girl herself felt rather ashamed, and wished she had tried to do better.

But Miss Ashton found no fault, laying each slate aside without remark, and when she was through, and it was nearly twelve o'clock, said that her uncle wished to say a few words to all the school. Then the folding-doors were opened, and presently a white-haired old gentleman walked in, and stood at Mrs Ashton's table.

He was as pleasant-looking an old gentleman as it would be easy to find, with a merry twinkle in his eye, and a kind smile on his lips; and when he spoke, it was in a hearty, cheery voice that it did one good to hear.

“My dear children,” he began, “I do not mean to keep you long, for school-hours are about over, and I suppose you would rather be at your play than listening to an old man. God has not given me any children of my own, but I love all the *young folks*, and like to make them happy, and to *help them along* in any way I can. Now, I have

a plan to propose to you, and it is this. I will give five prizes on the first of next May. Two will be for composition, one for each class, to be given to the young lady, or little girl, who shall produce the best composition, the subject to be chosen by herself. The next two will be for general good standing in the classes, perfect lessons, and punctual attendance, &c. All these, of course, will be bestowed according to the judgment of your teachers, and the number of your good marks. But the fifth and last prize, and the one which I consider the most important, will be given, according to the choice of the scholars of both classes, to her who has proved herself the most obedient, truthful, and unselfish among you ; in short, to her who shows in her life and conduct that she remembers and practises the two great commandments which our Saviour gave us ; viz., ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength ;’ and the second is like unto it, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.’ You shall yourselves say to whom this is due, who has best proved that she has the fear of God and the love of her neighbour in her heart, and before her eyes. And since I believe that

such a child will rejoice in the power of doing good to others, I will tell you what I mean to offer as a reward.

"In a certain hospital at a short distance from this city, where little deformed children and cripples are nursed and cared for, and often cured, I own a bed. That is, I pay for its use, and it is occupied by any needy child whom I may choose to send there. At present, it is taken up by a little girl who has been in the hospital for two years, and who was dreadfully lame when she went there. Now, she is so nearly cured that she walks without her crutches, and the doctors say that by the spring she will be quite well.

"When she goes away, her place will be ready for some other poor child who may need such care as she has had; and to the girl whom the voice of her schoolmates say has earned the right to it, shall be given the choice of its next occupant. Do you understand me, little ones? This bed, with all the comforts and kind care which belong to it, shall be given to any crippled child named by the girl who shall first be chosen by *the whole school* as the most deserving of the *pleasure*. Perhaps some among you may not

know any one, at present, who stands in need of it; but if you will make inquiries among your friends, I think you cannot fail to find some poor child to whom it will be a great blessing. And now, I will keep you no longer, but say good-bye to you, hoping to meet you all here in the spring, and that you will all do so well that we shall have a great deal of trouble in deciding who are to receive the prizes."

To describe the buzz of tongues, the exclamations, wonderings, and questionings that followed as soon as Mr Ashton had gone, would be quite impossible. It was twelve o'clock, and two or three nurses were waiting in the cloak-room for their little charges; but they found it hard work to coax them away. Miss Ashton had gone down-stairs with her uncle and mother, kindly giving Maggie a few minutes to talk off her excitement before she called her to her music lesson, which she knew would meet with small attention just at present.

"Oh! I hope, I hope, I *do* hope I shall gain a prize," said Maggie, clapping her hands, jumping about, and uttering each succeeding "hope" with more and more energy. "I must have one. Oh, I must!"

"Which one do you mean to try for, Maggie?" asked Nellie Ransom.

"I suppose I ought to wish most for the one for the lame child," said Maggie, pausing in her antics and looking thoughtful; "but I'm afraid I don't, so that's a sure sign I should not deserve to have it. No, I'd never get it; for I know I should not be the best child in the school. But I think maybe I could earn one of the others, and I will try for both; but most of all I'd rather have the one for composition. If I knew any one who would like to go to the hospital, I'd try for that; but I don't."

"O Maggie!" said Bessie, "don't you remember Jemmy Bent?"

"Why, to be sure," said Maggie. "Well, I'm so glad Jemmy did not hear me say that. He would think me too unkind to go and forget him. But, any way, I know I'd never earn *that* prize. I shall just do everything in the world to get the composition one."

"So shall I," said Gracie; "and I hope I'll be the one."

"I'm going to try too," said Dora Johnson; "*but only one of us can have it. So all the rest will have to be disappointed.*"

"Oh, dear!" said Maggie, "I didn't think about that. I'll be very sorry to have you all disappointed."

"You seem to be very sure you'll get it," said Fanny Leroy, rather snappishly.

Maggie coloured.

"Well, I did feel almost sure," she said. "I only thought about trying very hard to earn it, and I forgot all the rest wanted it too, and were going to try."

"But I think you'll be the one to have it, Maggie," said Bessie.

"Well, little mouse," said Kate Maynard, dancing in, catching up Bessie, and carrying her off to the other room, where she seated the child on her desk, and took a chair in front of her. "Well, little mouse, and what makes you so sure Maggie will get the composition prize for the other room?"

"She wants it so very much, and is going to try so hard," said Bessie.

"But, as Maggie just said herself, all the others want it too, and mean to try."

"Yes," said Bessie, smiling back into the merry black eyes; "but my Maggie is very clever. *She has a great deal of make up in her, and can*

tell such beautiful stories all out of her own head, and she can write them too."

"Come here, Maggie," said Kate, as the child, whose classmates were leaving, peeped around the door for Bessie. "Come here; I want to have a little talk with you about these prizes."

Maggie came slowly forward.

"Is that the way you mean to come when you are called up to get the composition prize?" said Kate. "Hurry up, tortoise, or you won't be here before recess is over."

At this, Maggie turned about as if she would have run away; but two of the larger girls caught her, and drew her over to Kate's desk.

"What are you afraid of, dear?" asked Kate, as Julia Grafton lifted the blushing child to her knee, and held her fast. "What is the reason you don't like me?"

Maggie made no answer, except by wriggling her head and shoulders, and putting up both arms, so as to cover her face as much as possible.

"Miss Kate," said Bessie, gravely, "you could not 'spect Maggie to be very fond of you."

"Why not?" asked the laughing Kate. "*You are very fond of me, are you not?*"

"*Not much,*" said Bessie. "But I'd be

fond of you, if you did not tease my Maggie. I shouldn't think you'd like to be such a trouble to any one, Miss Kate."

"I should like to know how I am a trouble to her," said Kate.

"You look at her."

"Look at her!" exclaimed Kate; "and is Maggie not to be looked at? Why, I look at you too, mousie; but you do not seem to mind it."

"You don't look at me that way," said Bessie, feeling quite sure that Kate understood what she meant. "When the doors are open, you look at Maggie in a way to tease her, and make her miss her lessons. The other day you made her miss three times."

"Pshaw! that's nonsense," said Kate, half-vexed, half-amused.

"You did," said Maggie, taking down her arms, the sense of her wrongs overcoming her bashfulness. "That was a very hard lesson, but I knew it quite well, but I could not say it when you stared at me, and shook your head at me, and laughed at me; and I missed and missed, so I had to go down to the foot, and I was next to the head before. And it wasn't my

fault, and it's too bad, now!" and the tears welled up to poor Maggie's eyes.

"So it was, Maggie," said Miss Maynard; "and I am truly sorry. I did not think, but I promise not to do so any more. Will you kiss, and be friends?"

Forgiving little Maggie was quite willing, and the treaty was sealed with a kiss; the child feeling more relieved than Kate would have thought possible, at the thought that those mischievous eyes would not work her any more trouble.

"Maggie, come to your music, dear," said Miss Ashton's voice at the door.

"There, now! Miss Ashton will see she has been crying, and I shall get into trouble," said Kate.

"Maggie will not say anything about it, if she can help it," said Bessie. "She never tells tales. Mamma has brought us up not to."

"What a wise mamma!" said Julia, laughing. "But did not Maggie tell Miss Ashton the day Kate made her miss."

"No," said Bessie: "she did not tell any one *but* mamma. We have to tell *her* all our *troubles*, you know."

"But about these prizes, Bessie," said Kate. "Since you 'have to be rather lazy,' I suppose you do not hope to gain any."

"I know mamma would not like me to study so much as to gain the composition or perfect-lesson prize," said Bessie, "so I did not think much about those, 'cept for Maggie; but"——

"But what?" said Julia, as the child hesitated. "Have you a hope of winning the other from the whole school, by being the best girl in it?"

"Not such a very *hope*," said Bessie; "but oh, I do wish so very, very much that Maggie or I could have it. I'd be just as glad if she'd have it, 'cause we'd both do the same with it."

"Then you know some child to whom you wish to give the bed in the hospital?" asked Kate.

"Yes," said Bessie; "and he deserves it very much. He is such a good boy, Miss Kate. If he had to earn it for himself, I know he'd get it. He is a great deal better than any one in this school."

"There's a compliment for us," said Fanny Berry.

"And he is a cripple, is he?" said Kate.

"Yes; shall I tell you about him?"

"Of course," answered Kate.

"His name is Jemmy Bent," said Bessie; "and, a good while ago, he fell off a stone wall, and hurt his back very much, so he had to lie in bed all the time. He and his mother and his sister Mary live in a little red house near Riverside, where Grandpapa Duncan lives; and grandpapa and Aunt Helen are very good to him; and his mother wanted to buy a wheel-chair, so that he could be out in the nice air and sun; but she was too poor, and grandpapa let Maggie and me earn the chair for him. And since he had the chair, he has been better and stronger; and grandpapa thought if he could go where he would have very good care, perhaps he might be made quite well. So he took a doctor, who knew a great deal, to see Jemmy; and the doctor said he never would be very well, but he thought he could be cured so much that he could go about on crutches. But he said he must have care all the time, and be where he could be 'tended to every day. But he said he ought not to be brought to the town, 'cause he was used to living in the country, and it was better for him. So *grandpapa* wanted to put him into a country

hospital, where they take lame children, maybe it was the very one the prize gentleman told us about ; but it was so full they had no room for Jemmy. So he has to wait, and Maggie and I were very sorry about it. But Jemmy did not know what grandpapa tried to do, so he was not disappointed. It would be a very happy thing for Jemmy if he could ever be so well as to walk on crutches, for now he has to be wheeled about in his chair, and cannot take one step on his feet."

"And he is such a very good boy, is he?" said Kate, when Bessie, having talked herself out of breath, came to a pause.

"Oh yes!" said the child: "you could not find an excellenter boy anywhere, I'm sure. He's so patient, and so happy; and he never frets or is cross, though he has a great deal of pain to bear. And if he's tired of being in one place, he cannot move himself, but has to wait till some one comes to move his chair. Sometimes he and his mother and sister used to be hungry too, and did not have enough bread to eat; and do you b'lieve, not a bit of butter on it! But Aunt Helen found that out, and she takes care of them now, and finds work for Mrs

Bent and Mary, so they need never be hungry any more, or cold either. And mamma helps them too; so they're rather comfortable now."

"Your Jemmy seems to have found good friends," said Kate. "And so you and Maggie earned his easy-chair for him; and now you want to earn this hospital-bed for him, do you?"

"Oh, so much!" The tone said as much as the words, as did the glowing cheeks and wistful eyes. There could be no doubt that the wish was heartfelt; and Kate, taking the earnest little face between her hands, kissed it warmly, and said—

"You're a darling, and Maggie's another. I think your mother has a pair of you."

"Yes," said Bessie, innocently; "and there are two more pair of us, Harry and Fred, and Frankie and baby."

The girls laughed again; and Kate, catching the child up in her arms, began to dance with her about the room, which was the signal for a general frolic, that lasted till Jane came to take the children home.

VL

BELLE.

"Yes, indeed, mamma! I must, I *must* have that prize for composition," said Maggie, after she and Bessie had told their mother of all the events of the morning.

"And do all the others think they *must* have it too, Maggie?"

"Well, yes, mamma, I believe they do; at least most of them want it very much, and Gracie and Fanny Leroy are very anxious for it. We were talking a little about it before I went to my music lesson; and when Dora put us in mind that all but one would have to be disappointed, somehow I did not feel so very happy about it. But I do not feel as if I could give up trying for it. Do you think it is selfish in me, mamma?"

"No, love, not at all. So long as you are *willing that the others should have an equal*

chance with yourself, and take no unfair advantage of them ; and that, I am sure, my Maggie would not do."

"No, indeed, mamma : I hope I would never be so mean. Then you think it is quite right for me to try for the prize?"

"Yes, dear. God has given to each one of us certain powers or talents which He means us to use for His service and our own improvement. Only let us be sure 'whatsoever we do, to do it to the glory of God,' and not simply to gain some praise or some fancied good for ourselves. For although we may succeed even with such a motive, yet it will not bring a blessing. Do your very best, not with the sole purpose of being *first*, or of carrying away the prize from others, but that you may please your Father in heaven, and make the most of the opportunities He has given you. Then you will be sure of the best of rewards, that of a good conscience, and the smile of God ; and if the earthly reward is won too, well and good, but that is not the chief thing."

"But I'm afraid I *did* think it was the chief thing," said Maggie, gravely shaking her head ; "and I'm afraid the reason I would like the prize so much, was because I wanted every one

to say I made the best composition. I don't think I thought a bit about glorifying God. Mamma, I hope you do not think I had better not try for the prize."

"Not at all, dear," said her mother. "I should be very sorry if you did not try to gain it. Do your very best, only do it with love to God and your neighbour; not feeling jealous or envious if another does better, or too much puffed up if you should be the one to receive the prize."

"Well, I will try not to be too very anxious about it, mamma," said Maggie.

But Maggie *was* very anxious about this prize; *so* anxious, so bent upon gaining it, that her mother was almost sorry it had been offered by Miss Ashton's uncle. Morning, noon, and night, it seemed to be upon her mind: everything that pleased or interested her was talked over as "a subject;" and Mrs Bradford was not a little amused one day to find in Maggie's room the following:—

"LIST OF PRIZE SUBJECTS.

Angels.

Elephants.

Doing unto Others.

Potry.

Mind your own Business.

A Fabel.

Sunset.

Dolls.

Churches.

Vegitables.

School.

A Letter.

A Story.

Christmas.

What can't be Cured must be Endured."

It had been arranged that the prize papers were not to be begun before the 1st of April, but that meanwhile the children were to do all they could to improve themselves, not only in composing, but also in writing and spelling. Miss Ashton gave them a composition to write during school-hours, one day in each week; but this did not satisfy Maggie, and at home she was constantly scribbling, and reading aloud her productions to the admiring Bessie, till her mamma, who thought she was too much taken up with it, and that she scarcely gave herself time enough for play in her excitement and anxiety, forbade *her to write more than half an hour each day, whether in school or at home; and this in spite*

of Maggie's plea that she was "only exercising her ideas."

So the days and weeks passed by, bringing nearer the Christmas holidays, when there would be no school for a fortnight; and about this time a very pleasant thing happened to our two little girls, and their new friend Belle.

As you were told before, the three children had become very intimate, Belle being often invited to pass the day with Maggie and Bessie; and she dearly loved to go. Colonel and Mrs Rush, with whom the children had "brought her acquainted," took a great interest in her, and sometimes, when Maggie and Bessie came to see them, would send over to Mr Powers' rooms for Belle to come and join her young playmates.

She was a sweet-tempered and truthful child; but she was not as obedient as Mrs Bradford's little girls, and was in some things rather spoiled. She would argue and fret when told to do a thing which did not suit her, and sometimes she would deliberately disobey. Her mother had been ill for a long time before her death, and not able to do much for her child; and her father, perhaps, humoured her more than was good for her, so *that Belle had not had much training, and gen-*

erally thought her own way was quite as wise and safe as that of older people. Mr Powers himself became fond of dropping in at the Bradfords' pleasant home, where he always found a warm welcome.

One day, shortly before Christmas, Belle went home from school with Maggie and Bessie, and spent the rest of the day with them, and in the evening her father came to take her home. He sat down in the library with Mr and Mrs Bradford, while the three little girls in the other room were talking over some very important holiday arrangements.

"I fear my poor pet will not wear as bright a face to-morrow as she does to-day," said Mr Powers, as he looked through the open doors at the happy little ones.

"Why?" asked Mrs Bradford; "there is no trouble in store for her, I hope."

Mr Powers shook his head sadly.

"Yes," he said: "I shall have to leave her for a while; and, what is more, so will Daphne, her old nurse. Daphne's son is very ill in Savannah, and the old woman, of course, is most anxious *to see him* before he dies. She is too helpless *and ignorant* to be allowed to go alone; and, as

I have business which must have taken me South in a few weeks, I shall go a little sooner, and see Daphne safely there. But we must travel day and night, if we are to be in time; and such a journey would be too much for my poor baby. I shall be forced to leave her behind, and it will go near to break her little heart. We must start to-morrow at noon, and I shall have to tell her in the morning."

"But what do you mean to do with her?" asked Mrs Bradford.

"To leave her with Miss Ashton, if she will take charge of her, as I think she will. I shall go and see her this evening after I have taken Belle home. She will be well cared for there, I am sure."

"Yes," said Mrs Bradford; "but I fear she will be very lonely after school-hours are over. There are only Miss Ashton and her mother; and, though I do not doubt she would receive every kindness, it will be dull for the little thing. Suppose you let her come to us: she will bear your absence better if she is with our children whom she is fond of."

Mr Powers' melancholy face lighted up with pleasure; but the next moment he shook his head doubtfully.

"It would be the very thing for her," he said, "but quite too much to ask from you. You are not strong yet, and it would not be right to give you the charge of another child."

But Mrs Bradford would not listen to this, as long as Mr Powers was satisfied to have his child with her. Belle was not much trouble, she said; and nurse and Jane would readily do for her as for the others. So, after a little more talk, it was settled, greatly to the father's satisfaction. Mrs Bradford said it would be well to tell Belle now, while she had the other children at hand to console her, and make her feel she might enjoy herself even though her father and nurse were away; and the little girls were called in.

"Belle," said Mrs Bradford, "how would you like to come and stay with Maggie and Bessie for a while?"

"What! do you mean to stay all night and sleep here?" said Belle, with wide-open eyes.

"Yes, dear, for several nights, for three or four weeks. Would you not have pleasant times?"

"Yes, if papa comes too," said Belle, drawing herself from Mrs Bradford's arm, and springing

to her father's knee, where she clung to him, as if she feared she were to be parted from him by force.

"But papa cannot come too, my precious one," said her father. "I have to go on a journey; and Mrs Bradford has kindly said you may stay here with her little girls, till I come back."

"I shall go on a journey too: yes, I shall, I *shall*," was Belle's answer.

"But you cannot, darling," said Mr Powers; and then, as cheerfully as he could, he told his little girl why he and Daphne must go away, and what a pleasant arrangement had been made for her during their absence.

Belle did not make the outcry which Mrs Bradford had expected, but every time her father paused, repeated, "I *shall* go a journey too."

Poor child! she was not accustomed to a ready obedience; and she knew that if she persisted, she could often carry her point with her father; while he, feeling that this time, at least, he *could* not yield, feared each moment to hear her break out in cries and sobs when she found she could not have her own way. To all his coaxings and

promises, she made the one quiet but determined reply, though each time her voice became more choked.

But now Bessie came softly behind Mr Powers, and gently trying to disengage one of the little hands which were tightly clasped about his neck, said in a low tone—

“You would not make a trouble for your papa, when you say you are ‘his little comfort,’ Belle: would you?”

“I *shall* go a journey with him,” said Belle, in the same old tone.

“Oh, no!” said Maggie, coming round to the other side: “you will stay here with us, and have such a lovely, lovely time. We are a *very* nice family to stay with,” she added, persuasively.

“Belle does not doubt that, I believe,” said Mr Powers, smiling rather sadly; “but she and I have no one but one another to pet, and it comes very hard to part, even for a time.”

“But we are going to try and make her very, very happy, even if you are away, sir,” answered Bessie. “And, Belle, next week Christmas will be here, and if you go on a journey, you will not see our tree; and we have a great many nice *things to do* in the holidays.”

"We have some of our presents to buy yet," said Maggie, "and we want you to help us, and we have money to buy you a present too; and papa and mamma will give you presents if you stay: will you not, mamma?"

Mrs Bradford said, "Certainly;" but all these promises only drew forth the same answer.

"And we are all to go to Riverside in grand-mamma's sleigh, and spend the day there," said Bessie; "and you will go too, and if there is not enough of room, I will let you have my place."

"Why, how much you will have to tell me of when I come back," said Mr Powers, cheerfully. "You must be sure and remember all these pleasant things, so that I may hear about them."

"I *shall* go a" — began Belle; but before she had time to finish the old sentence, Maggie broke in with—

"Oh! she could write to you about them, Mr Powers. She can make up a letter every day, and I will write it for her, and she can put it in the lamp-post herself. Will not that be nice, Belle?"

"I couldn't make up so much," said Belle.

"Oh, yes! you could do enough," said Maggie. "You could tell your father you was alive, any

way, and he'll be glad to know that. Yes, we'll send him a letter every day."

This proved to be a most happy idea, and was the first thing which brought any consolation to poor little Belle; and her father, seeing that she was at last interested, improved it by saying—

"Dear! dear! I shall have to leave behind me quite a fortune in postage-stamps to pay for so many letters. Let me see if I have enough."

And he pulled out his pocket-book, and, taking from it a quantity of stamps, began to count them over; while Belle, after submitting to let Bessie wipe the tears from her eyes, watched him with eager interest, as did the two other little girls.

"There is one for the day after to-morrow," said Mr Powers. "You will not think it worth while to write to-morrow, I suppose."

"Oh, yes! I think they had better begin at once," said Mrs Bradford, who saw that this writing of letters to her papa was likely to divert Belle's mind from her grief at parting with him.

"Very well," replied Mr Powers; and he counted out a postage-stamp for each day as far as his stock would go. "Here are only enough for two weeks. We shall have to stop and buy *some as we go home, Belle.*"

"And here, Belle," said Bessie, "you may have this box of mine to keep them in. You may have it for your very own to keep all your life."

"And you will write her letters for her : will you, Maggie ?" asked Mr Powers.

"Yes, sir. Mamma lets me have half an hour for writing every day, and I will give it to Belle."

Mrs Bradford was glad to hear Maggie say this. She had feared that the little girl was too eager and anxious for the composition prize ; but this proved that the desire for it had not made her selfish, and that she was willing to lessen her chances for it for the sake of being a help and comfort to her motherless little friend. She did not tell Maggie that she might still " exercise her ideas " during the allowed half-hour, and take some other time for writing Belle's letters. Since the dear child was willing to make the sacrifice, she thought it just as well to let her do so.

So Belle was pacified, and made to believe that she might, after all, be able to bear the separation from her father ; and this letter-writing did indeed prove to be a great source of comfort and amusement to her.

Mr Powers did not send her to school the next morning, but kept her with him till the last

moment, taking her himself to Mrs Bradford's house, and leaving her in the kind lady's care. When Maggie and Bessie came home, they found her sitting on the sofa beside their mother, her head in her lap, and looking the very picture of woe. She brightened considerably, however, when she saw them, and asked Maggie if she was ready to write her letter for her, saying she was "only going to tell her father that she was going to die of grief."

Mrs Bradford made no objection to this, but said that the children must all have their dinner before they did anything else; and as she expected, by the time Belle had made a good meal, and chatted, as she eat it, with her happy, merry little companions, she thought better of her intentions of "dying of grief."

Then the letter was written; but as it was so short a time, only two hours indeed, since Mr Powers had gone, there was not much to tell; and it contained only these words:—

"DEAR, DARLING PAPA,—I think I better not die of trouble of your going away, 'cause Maggie *says then all the postage stamps will be wasted.*

"YOUR DEAR LITTLE BELLE"

The most important part of these letters according to the thinking of the little ones, was the postage-stamps, and the putting them into the lamp-post boxes; and this Belle always insisted on doing herself.

On this day, they all went out to walk together, and when they reached the first box, the children paused to put the letter in. The box was far above their heads, and a gentleman was there before them, putting letters through the slide.

"Shall I put in your letter for you, my dear?" said he to Belle, who held the precious message to papa fast in her hand, while she waited her turn.

"No, sir," said Belle. "I want to send my own letter to papa my own self. He won't like it so much if somebody else sends it."

"Oh, that is it!" said the stranger; "but you can scarcely reach up here. Shall I lift you?"

Belle agreed, and the gentleman lifted her, and let her slip the letter into the box herself, telling her he was sure her papa would be much pleased with it; and Belle went on her way well satisfied.

"Do you think dear papa has my letter yet?"

she said to Bessie, when, an hour later, they returned home.

"Oh, yes, long ago!" answered Bessie. "Why, we took a long walk, Belle: and it's a great while since you sent it."

"Maybe he's sitting in the railway carriage, reading it," said Belle; to which Bessie replied, "Course he is," and since neither of them knew it, neither of them was disturbed by the fact that it would take three or four days for the letter to reach Mr Powers; and Belle was made quite happy when she received the next morning a little note from her papa, written in the railway carriage and posted at the first stopping-place on his way.

She and Bessie made another droll mistake one day. Maggie had gone out with her Aunt Annie, and so was out of the way when it was time for the others to take their walk; and lo! the daily letter was not written, forgotten for the first time! Bessie and Belle were both in a great way about it. Mamma, too, having gone to ride, there was no help to be had from her.

"Do it yourself, can't you?" said Bessie: "*you can print a little.*"

"Yes," said Belle, seizing on a sheet of paper.

"But what shall I say? I haven't much to tell to-day."

"And we haven't time for much thoughts about it," said Bessie. "Nurse has baby almost ready, and she don't like her to be kept waiting. You might tell him you are alive. Maggie said he would like to know that."

"Yes," said Belle, and she began to write; but a new difficulty arose.

"How do you spell 'alive'?" she asked.

Bessie thought a moment.

"I don't know," she said, slowly. "Oh, yes! *life* is one of the Bible-texts, and it's l-i-f-e. I think that's the way you spell 'alive,' only to put a *a* in front of it."

Belle took it all in good faith, and printed out,—

"DEAR PAPA,—I am alive.

"So good-by."

Then it was put into the envelope.

"But I don't know how to put papa's name," said Belle.

Bessie had not thought of this trouble.

"Shall she ask nurse or Jane?" she said.

"No," said Belle. "I don't believe they know

how to write papa's name, or where he has gone to."

"But won't the postage-stamp make it go all safe?" asked Bessie.

"Oh, to be sure!" said Belle, and the postage-stamp was put on; and nurse and Jane appearing at that moment with the other children, they set out, Belle in great glee at having contrived to "do" her letter all by herself, and reached the familiar lamp-post, where she was lifted up by Jane, and dropped it in, neither of the nurses observing that it had no address; and both the little girls firmly believing it would go in the proper direction with that important postage-stamp on it.

After all, Belle continued to be very happy while her father was away. She would have been very ungrateful if she had not been both happy and good when so much was done to please her. The Christmas holidays came and passed, and she shared in all the enjoyments which were provided for Maggie and Bessie, and was treated quite as if she were one of the family; while Mrs Bradford could not help *thinking that she had improved a little, being more obedient and far less wilful.* The example

of such a prompt obedience as was shown by the other children had done her good.

And now the holidays were over, and they were back at school once more, while the time for Mr Powers' return was drawing near.

VII.


THE HURT FOOT.

"OH, oh!" said Belle.

She did not say it as if she were pleased; on the contrary, the tone had in it some pain and a good deal of fear. And that was not to be wondered at; for Belle was half-way up a stone fence,—that fence which divided Mrs Ashton's garden from the ball-ground where Mr Peters' boys played; and a large stone had slipped and hurt her foot, and the wall felt shaky and very much as if it might give still more.

There she stood, all crouched together, clinging to the topmost stones with her small hands, and afraid to go up or down lest the whole fence should fall on her.

"Oh, o-o-o-oh!" said she again, but not loud; for there were boys at play just beyond the wall, and if they heard her, Harry and Fred Bradford *would come and lift her down and take her to*



the house, and Miss Ashton and Mrs Bradford would know how disobedient she had been.

For Belle remembered quite well that she and Bessie had been forbidden to go near this fence, and watch the boys at their play; for both ladies feared that the balls might come over the wall and strike the little girls and hurt them. And more than this, Mrs Bradford had told her she must not go out of doors with those thin shoes on. So when Belle had made up her mind to disobey her kind friends, and to go near the ball-ground in spite of the orders she had received, she had not dared to ask Miss Ashton to change her shoes, or put on her cloak and hat for her, lest she should be asked where she was going. But after waiting till the lady was busy with Maggie's music lesson, she had run out in the little prunella shoes, which were fit only for the house, and with her cloak half fastened, for she could not put it on properly herself. Now the damp, cold air was blowing about her, and making her feel very chilly and uncomfortable.

She had not told herself that she was going to be disobedient; but had said that she would just run down to the field, and peep over the fence at the boys. When she came there, however, the

fence was too high for her to look over, and remembering the clump of evergreen bushes which was just beyond, she thought she would climb to the top of the wall, and sit there, herself hidden by the bushes, while she could see the boys quite well. That old summer-house would hide her from the house.

So Belle had thought, saying to herself, "Aunt Margaret"—so she called Mrs Bradford—"did not know it was very safe behind the bushes, and the balls cannot hit me there. I think she would let me if she knew."

Something kept saying to her, "Oh, no, Belle! you know Aunt Margaret would not let you. You are very naughty, little Belle. What would your papa say if he knew what you were doing?" But she would not listen.

Ah! if Belle were so sure Mrs Bradford would let her do this, why was she so afraid of being seen?

She was already sadly punished, for she now found that the bushes which hid her from the boys also hid them from her. She could hear their voices very well, and knew that they would hear her if she cried aloud; but she could not see one of them. And that stone had hurt her

foot, oh, so badly! and there she was, afraid to move either way.

But it would not do for her to be found there; and at last she slipped down from the wall, and ran as fast as she could into the old summer-house. There she climbed up on the seat, and prepared to look at the foot that was hurt.

Very slowly and carefully, for fear of knotting the lace, she unfastened her shoe, and pulled it off. Next the little sock was removed, and Belle turned up her small foot, so that she might see the heel.

"Ow, ow!" she said, when she saw it. "There's a great piece of skin off it. Ow, ow!"

She had almost forgotten the pain in her foot while she was running from the forbidden spot; but now when she saw how badly it looked, it seemed to feel a good deal worse. She sat and gazed at it for some moments, and then taking up her sock, she looked in it, turned it inside out, and shook it. Next she shook out her shoe, and felt all around the inside with her hand; next she looked all about the planked floor of the summer-house.

"Why! where has that skin gone to?" she exclaimed.

But although she had not found that for which she was looking, she found something else,—something very bad indeed. Belle thought it worse even than that ugly graze upon her foot. There was a great hole in her sock; and worse and worse, another! a jagged tear in the little shoe! She took up the shoe and the sock again, and sat with one in each hand, looking at them with a very sober face.

“There now!” she said at last. “I disobeyed my Aunt Margaret fee things. I came out with these shoes on, that’s one; I came down to the ball-ground, that’s two; and I climbed the fence, that’s fee. She didn’t tell me don’t climb the fence, but I think I knew she didn’t want me to; so I’m ’fraid it was a disobey. Now I’ll have to go and tell her, and then she’ll look sorry at me; and I think perhaps she’ll punish me, and perhaps papa will know it. Oh dear! I wish I hadn’t, I wish I hadn’t!” and Belle began to cry.

By and by she stopped crying, wiped her eyes, and began to put on her shoe and stocking. They had come off easily enough; but to put *them on* was another thing. At last the sock *was pulled on* after a fashion, all one-sided, and

half an inch beyond her toes, for Belle was not used to dressing herself. But do what she would, she could not put on the shoe. She pulled and pulled till she was quite red in the face, but all in vain; and at last she gave an impatient scream and threw the shoe from her.

"Bad old thing!" she said, and sat a moment frowning at it. But the shoe did not mind being looked cross at, at all; and presently Belle sprung to her feet, and went and picked it up, feeling rather ashamed.

"I am going to Miss Ashton," she said; "and she'll ask me where I went, and I'll tell her."

But just then she heard Bessie's voice. She had quite forgotten that the half-hour for the music lesson must have gone by, and that it must be time to go home; and there was Bessie running down the garden-path, and calling to her.

"Belle, Belle! where are you, Belle?"

Bessie had not come to school that morning, for the weather had been so damp that her mother had not thought it safe for her to go out; but as it had cleared up before Jane went for the other children, she had given her leave to go with *the nurse*.

But when they came to the school, Belle was not to be found; and some one saying she had been seen to run out in the garden, Bessie went in search of her, while Jane put on Maggie's things.

"Here I am, Bessie," said Belle, putting her head out of the summer-house.

Bessie ran to her, and great was her astonishment when she saw Belle standing there with her jacket all awry and half-buttoned, and her shoe held in her hand.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"Oh, I was naughty!" said Belle. "I went and climbed up on the wall where your mamma told us not to go; and a great ugly stone hurt my foot, and tore my shoe and stocking, and oh, Bessie! I can't find the skin."

She showed Bessie the hurt foot, and then a new search was commenced for the missing piece of skin; but it was all in vain, and after much wonderment as to what could have become of it, Bessie begged Belle to come at once to the house.

"For Jane must have Maggie ready," she said; "and you will take cold barefeeted, Belle. We *must go home and tell mamma.*"

The garden-path was planked, like the sum-

mer-house floor, about half-way up to the house; and Belle went on pretty well over the smooth boards, which did not hurt the little stocking-foot, but when she came to the gravel walks, it was not so easy. There the pebbles hurt; and she limped and hopped along till she came to the portico, where Miss Ashton and Jane met her, full of alarm at the state in which they found her.

Miss Ashton did not scold, but she looked very much grieved at Belle's disobedience; and she told Jane she must take her home as fast as possible, so that the hurt foot might be attended to, and something be given to her, which might prevent her from taking cold.

As for putting on the walking-shoe, or even the cut shoe, that was quite out of the question. Miss Ashton rolled a soft handkerchief around the foot; and, wrapping a shawl over that, Jane took Belle in her arms, and hurried home as fast as Bessie's little feet could keep pace with her. But if Miss Ashton had not much to say, Jane found enough.

"To think of your doing such a thing, Miss Belle!" she said; "to be so naughty, and hurt yourself, and maybe make yourself ill, and give

so much trouble to Mrs Bradford. Now she'll be so worried, and that's very bad for her. You know she was worse the other day when Frankie fell down and cut his head."

"But that was most entirely your fault, Jane," said Maggie: "you ran in very suddenly, and screamed to mamma that Frankie was 'most killed; and papa said it gave her a shock, and people ought to tell her things quietly and gently, so as not to frighten her."

"I dont know what she'll say when I tell her," said Jane, "and your papa away, and all."

"You shan't tell her," said Belle: "I'll tell her myself."

"Yes," said Bessie. "It's better for Belle to tell mamma herself, Janey; and I will help her. I have thought how we can tell her in a manner that is not at all shocking, and she would rather we would tell of ourselves when we have been naughty."

When they reached home, Jane carried Belle to the head of the stairs, where she put her down; and the three little girls arranged their plan for telling mamma.

Belle took off her hat, and putting the little shoe, which she still held in her hand, in the

hollow of the crown, held the hat against her bosom with both arms, so that the shoe was quite hidden. She, as well as the other two, wanted Mrs Bradford to question them before she saw the shoe or the foot. It was not that they wished to keep anything back from her, but they feared to tell her too suddenly.

They all wished it was over, especially Belle ; and the young faces were by no means as bright as they usually were, when they ran in to mamma's room on their daily return from school. Belle kept behind the others until she came close to Mrs Bradford, when, without putting up her face for the kiss which generally welcomed her, she sat down on a stool at the lady's side, still keeping her bandaged foot carefully out of sight.

Mrs Bradford did not speak to her, or tell her to come and kiss her, as Belle half hoped, half feared, she would do. She kept on with her work with a very grave face, and that work was a pretty little jacket, like those belonging to Maggie and Bessie, which she was embroidering for Belle. The child knew it was for her ; and she had been disobeying that dear, kind friend. She seemed to feel how naughty and ungrateful she had been even more than she had done before.

"She looks as sorry as if she knew," said Belle to herself: "but then she can't know yet. No one saw me do it but God, and He never tells about people; but I think He's very sorry too, 'cause I was so naughty. Maybe He won't be so sorry with me if I tell Aunt Margaret very quick. I'll just do it, if Bessie don't make haste."

Bessie was just preparing to tell her story; but in order not to shock her mamma, she came to it in rather a roundabout way, not at all like her usual fashion of telling things. Sitting down upon the rug at Belle's side, she said in a grave tone,—

"Mamma, Belle and Maggie and I have found out something to-day."

"Have your, dear?" said mamma, very soberly; but she did not ask what it was, as Belle had hoped she would. It would make the confession so much easier, she thought, if Aunt Margaret would only question them a little; but she did not seem inclined to do so. And there was a cut shoe beneath the hat, which Belle had not allowed to slip carefully down into her lap, keeping both hands pressed on it, as if she feared it would jump out of its own accord, and show itself before the proper time.

"Yes, mamma," said Bessie, in reply to her mother: "it is something we did not know about before."

This time there was no answer; but Belle thought Mrs Bradford looked at her as if she expected she would speak for herself, instead of letting Bessie do it for her. She shrugged up her shoulders, wriggled herself about on her seat, and felt more and more uncomfortable.

Bessie waited a moment, and then spoke again.

"We've found out the colour of the inside of people's heels, mamma," she said; while Belle looked with a very innocent air into the fire. Bessie went on, "Least we've found out the colour of Belle's, and I s'pose all people's are the same. It's a nice colour—it's pink."

"How did you find that out, dear?" asked mamma.

"Belle's foot is peeled, and we saw the inside of it. But, mamma, we couldn't find the skin."

"How did the skin come off your foot, Belle?" asked Mrs Bradford, trying not to smile, and speaking for the first time to the little culprit, while Aunt Bessie, who sat by, turned her face aside.

"'Cause a big hole came in my stocking, ma'am," answered Belle.

"How was that? It was a very good little stocking when it was put on this morning."

"'Cause a big, larger hole came in my shoe, and it went foo and foo."

"But it was a very good shoe too, quite new," answered Mrs Bradford. "How did a hole come in it already?"

"A stone came on it, Aunt Margaret; but—Aunt Margaret—I'm 'fraid it came on it 'cause I was naughty. I disobeyed you fee times, Aunt Margaret;" and Belle's voice had a piteous tone in it, as if she were about to burst into a cry again.

"And does my little Belle want to tell me all about it?" asked Mrs Bradford, throwing down her work, and holding out her arms to the child.

Belle let hat and shoe slip to the ground, and in another moment had scrambled into Mrs Bradford's lap. Ah! what a comfort it was to feel about her those kind arms, whose dear, loving clasp reminded her of those of her lost *mamma*! and to nestle her head against Aunt Margaret's shoulder, while she confessed with

many a penitent sob how naughty she had been !

"I s'pose you'll have to punish me very much : won't you, Aunt Margaret ?" said Belle, when her story was finished.

"My poor little girl, I'm afraid you have punished yourself more than I should," said Mrs Bradford.

"Oh, no, Aunt Margaret ! I did not punish myself one bit. I did not go in the closet for a single moment," said Belle.

While Belle had been talking, Mrs Bradford had taken off the bandage, and was looking at the little grazed foot. She still held it tenderly in her hand when the child said these last words.

"You have punished yourself without going in the closet," she said. "This poor little foot must have some salve on it, and be bound up ; and you cannot wear a shoe for several days, lest it should be rubbed. So you will have to stay in the house and not go out at all.

"And, Belle," Mrs Bradford went on more slowly now, "a telegram came from your father a short time ago, saying that he would be here to-night, and begging me to send you to the *railroad station* to meet him ; but it will be late.

and I am afraid to let you go out even in a carriage, after you have run so much risk of taking cold. He will have to be disappointed, my little girl; and I fear he will be sorry when he sees your foot, and hears how it was hurt."

Now, indeed, Belle felt that she was punished for her disobedience. The delight of having her father back again was almost lost sight of in her distress at not being able to go and meet him, and the thought that he would know how naughty she had been.

Mrs Bradford put her on the sofa, and brought some salve and soft linen, and bound up the foot, after which Belle was carried down-stairs, so that she might have her dinner with the other children. But she could not eat; the thought of her father and his disappointment brought a great lump in her throat; and though she tried hard not to cry, the tears would find their way out and roll down her cheeks. Maggie and Bessie did their best to console her, but all in vain; and when, at last, they went out for their walk, which mamma would not allow them to omit, they left her on the library sofa in a very mournful state.

"If papa wouldn't look sorry, I wouldn't care

so very much," said Belle, as Mrs Bradford tried to comfort her. "I promised him to be good all the time, and I went and was naughty just when he was coming back."

"I am very sorry for you, dear," said Mrs Bradford; "but I shall tell your papa you have been a good girl all the rest of the time; and this will help you to remember that your older friends know best."

"Yes," sobbed Belle. "But, Aunt Margaret, I don't think *myself* gave myself such a great, large punishment as this. I don't think I could do it. I think God did it, 'cause He knew I deserved it, for disobeying you so. Maybe He thought I wouldn't tell you, and you wouldn't know to punish me, so He better do it. I forgot He saw me, till my foot was hurt, and I was 'fraid on the fence."

"Yes," said Mrs Bradford, "I think you are right, and that 'our Father in heaven' meant to give His little girl a lesson. What lesson has my Belle learned this morning?"

"To mind you, my wise friend," said Belle.

"Yes; and what else?"

The child thought a moment, and then said, "That He sees me ev'ry day, and is sorry with

me when I'm naughty. But, Aunt Margaret, what made you look so sorry at me, as if you knew, before I told you."

"I did know, Belle."

"Why, how? Did God tell you?"

"Aunt Bessie was coming along the street on the other side of the play-ground, and she saw a little figure on the top of the fence; and she knew who it was, and felt frightened lest you should fall and be hurt; for she was too far away to be of any help. But God took care of the little girl who did not care for herself, and let her come down off the fence without being killed, as she might have been. Aunt Bessie saw that you had come down safely, and then she came here and told me about it. She did not know that you were hurt, nor did I; but I felt anxious to know if you would come and confess your fault, and though I am sorry that you were disobedient, I do not feel half as grieved as I should have done if you had tried to hide it."

"I'd have told you quicker, Aunt Margaret, only we were afraid you'd be too shocked, and Bessie made up that way to tell you."

"You were very considerate," said Mrs Brad-

ford, smiling as she remembered Bessie's round-about fashion of bringing out her story.

Belle sat still with a grave face for a few moments, thinking of what her kind friend had said.

"Aunt Margaret," she then began, "God took good care of *me*; but He did not take very good care of my foot, did He?"

"Yes, Belle: this little foot might have been so crushed by that stone that you never would have been able to walk again; but God watched over it, and only let it be hurt enough to remind it not to run into naughty, disobedient ways. He has been very good to you, dear."

Just then, Patrick came to say some visitors were in the other room; and Mrs Bradford, giving Belle a picture-book, told her to amuse herself with it till she came back.

Belle sat still for a few moments after Mrs Bradford left her, not looking at the pictures, but thinking of her own naughtiness; and at last, she said aloud—

"I think if God took so much trouble to punish me just enough to make me remember, and not enough to make me a lame girl all my life, I'd better punish myself a little too."

Belle sometimes punished herself when she knew she had been naughty, and her way of doing this was to shut herself up in the closet.

There was one which opened out of the library. It was not dark, but the little window which lighted it was high up in the wall, so that she could not see out; and there was nothing there to amuse her, for it was hung around with overcoats and hats, so that it was really disagreeable to her to shut herself up there as she had done more than one since she had been at Mrs Bradford's.

She slipped down from the sofa, and went into the closet, where she pulled the door to, and sat down upon the floor, still thinking how sorry papa would look. But presently she felt tired, and looking around her, she saw a carriage-robe lying in the corner. She rolled up one end of this for a pillow, and curled herself up upon it; and there, a few moments later, Mrs Bradford found her fast asleep. She called Jane, and had Belle carried to her crib, feeling very thankful that the little girl truly repented of her fault; for she saw she was quite in earnest about punishing herself. Belle took a long nap, and the children had been *home* some time. She awoke, and it was then *nearly time* for her papa to come. When at

last he arrived, he did indeed look grieved to see the hurt foot, and hear how it had happened, but he was glad she had not tried to hide it.

"But, papa," said Belle, when she had finished her confession, "Bessie and I could not find that skin. I wonder what did become of it."

The children were all three greatly puzzled and disturbed at the disappearance of the piece of skin which had been scraped from Belle's foot; and late that night when mamma was herself going to bed, and went to give her birdies a last kiss, Bessie roused a little as her mother leaned over her, and murmured sleepily—

"I wonder what did become of Belle's skin."

VIII.

THE BROKEN CLOCK.

It was recess; and Bessie stood at the back school-room window, watching her brothers and the rest of Mr Peters' boys at play. Four of the older girls were in the room, two of them standing by the fire, talking; while the others, namely, Kate Maynard and Fanny Berry, were at their desks, each preparing a neglected lesson. Their French master came at half-past twelve, and they were now in a great hurry to finish the exercises which should have been ready the night before.

"There!" said Kate, throwing down her pen, and shutting her exercise-book with an energetic slap upon the cover, "I am through. How about you, Fanny?"

Fanny looked up at the little clock which stood upon the mantel-piece, and shook her *head despairingly*.

"No," *she said*, "and I shall not be able to

finish. I am not half as quick as you, Kate. It is twenty minutes past twelve, and old Gaufray will be here in ten minutes. Oh, if I had but ten more, I would do it! He threatened to complain of me to Mrs Ashton next time I was not ready for him. It's all the fault of that story-book you lent me, Julia Grafton. I sat the whole evening reading it, and quite forgot my exercise."

"Please do not blame me or the book," said Julia. "I did not ask you to borrow it, nor did the book request to be read, I imagine."

"Do stop talking, and write all you can," said Kate. "What's the good of wasting more time?"

"If I only had ten minutes more!" moaned Fanny again.

"If the clock were only slow, as it was the other day," said Mary Merton. "We need not tell Monsieur that it was not right, for he would never know; for he has no watch of his own, and always goes by this."

"Tell him it's too fast," said another.

"He'll be sure to suspect something when he sees Fanny scrambling through her exercise at that rate."

"Not doing that," laughed Fanny, who, with a pen in her hand, was writing away as fast as she could, caring little for the mistakes she was making, if she only finished, and handed in with a flourish, she might escape the threat-
"Mrs Ashton."

"To be sure," said Kate. "Why did not we think of that before? Monsieur will be nicely taken in."

“Mrs Ashton will not suspect anything,” said Mary, as Kate laid her hand upon the clock. “It has been wrong once: why not again?”

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looking from one to another in guilty and alarmed silence.

Mary Merton was the first to break it.

"Thank fortune!" she exclaimed. "The thing does not *look* damaged; and no one need know how it happened, if we all keep our own secret. Oh, there's Bessie Bradford!" and Mary looked more frightened than she had done before, as she fixed her eyes on the child's shocked and astonished face; for she, as well as the others, had a feeling that no deceit or concealment was to be looked for from Bessie.

Until that moment, they had all forgotten the presence of the little girl, who now stood silent on the window-seat, her face turned towards the uneasy group, looking from one to another with an expression of mingled wonder, grief, and indignation, under which the most insensible among them felt herself abashed.

"O Mousie!" said Kate Maynard, who generally called Bessie by that pet name, "I had forgotten that you were there! Remember you are not to say a word. If you do, I will never forgive you."

There was no time for more, for the professor's step was heard approaching; and as the girls

suddenly scattered to different parts of the room, he opened the door and came in.

"Ah!" he said in French, after bidding them good morning and looking at the clock, "I see I am too early, and I am glad; for I have left at Mr Peters' a book which I shall need, and I have yet time to return for it. Your pardon, young ladies." Then as he turned to go, and caught sight of Bessie, he smiled and came towards her. She was a great favourite with him, although she was not one of his scholars; for he had now and then met her in this room, and her polite and lady-like little ways were very pleasing to the ceremonious old Frenchman, who always made a point of bowing to her with his very best grace, which Bessie would return by giving him her mite of a hand to shake, and saying prettily, "Bon jour, Monsieur," as her mamma had taught her.

"Ah!" said Monsieur Gaufrau, changing from his own language to his broken English, for he knew that Bessie understood only a few words of the former—"Ah! you look sad, *ma petite*. What have you? you are trouble. These great demoiselles have tease you? Do not be sad of that; they do not mean nothing; it is but their

joy. They are good of heart, but have not too much thought. Mademoiselle Maynard, you cannot make glad once more your little friend? I am of haste;" and patting Bessie on the head, he waved his hand politely towards Kate, as if committing the little child to her care, and hurried away.

Bessie looked after the gray-haired and kind-hearted old gentleman as he went out, and closed the door behind him, and then turned her eyes on Kate. Was Kate, of whom she had really grown very fond, going to carry on this deception? She had not time to speak, scarce even to collect her thoughts; for the next moment the young lady caught her up in her usual abrupt fashion, and seating her on her desk, placed herself before her, while the rest gathered hurriedly around.

Bessie knew that a struggle was before her, and somehow she felt that all these great girls were banded together against her. There was only time for a little wish, a half-breathed upward thought; but it was heard and answered.

"Bessie," said Kate, in a low tone, "you are not to speak of this, or to let any one suppose

that you knew of it, or were in the room. Do you understand?"

The child looked steadily at her, though her colour rose, and her breath came quickly, and she had, oh! such a longing to be safely home at the side of her own dear mamma.

"S'pose some one asks me?" she said.

Kate coloured in her turn, and hesitated.

"Say you don't know anything about it," said Mary Merton. "It is true enough: you don't. You had nothing to do with the clock."

"But I *know* about it," answered Bessie: "I saw what did happen to it, and I heard that noise it made; and I know something very much is the matter with it. Once Fred threw his ball in our nursery, and it knocked down the clock, and it made just that noise, and was so spoiled papa had to buy another one. But Fred went away and told papa," she added, as a hint to her hearers of the course she thought they ought to take.

"Telling one's papa is a different thing from telling Mrs Ashton," said Mary. "She will be so furious if she finds out how it happened."

"Ah! that is it," said Kate: "I would not hesitate a moment to tell her I had broken the

clock; but how can I tell her how it can about?"

"And I shall get into trouble too," said Fanny, in her fretful tones. "Girls, what shall we do?"

"Do!" repeated Mary Merton. "There but *one* thing to do, and that is to stand by one another. There are only four of us here and none of us know anything about it: that is all. As for you, little tell-tale, if you have a word to say about it, remember that it is your friend Kate you will get into a peek of trouble

"I'm not a tell-tale!" said Bessie, indignantly, keeping down her temper with great difficulty. "I'm not a tell-tale; and if you don't want to, I won't tell any one the clock is broken, not even my dear mamma, or my own Maggie. I s'pose I needn't, when I didn't do it myself. But if Mrs Ashton asks about it, I'll have to tell her."

"Why don't you run quick, and tell her about it now?" sneered Mary. "You can get us all nicely punished, if you make a good story of it. Go, tell-tale, go!"

Bessie made no answer, but watched Kate's face anxiously.

"See here, Bessie," said Fanny: "promise us not to say a word about it, if Mrs Ashton asks; and I will dress a beautiful doll for you."

Bessie shook her head resolutely.

"Do you think I'd tell a story for a doll?" she answered, and then, putting her arms round Kate's neck, she whispered, "I would help you if I could, Katie: but I couldn't make Jesus sorry even for you; and *you* won't do it, dear, will you? Please think about Him, Katie, and don't tell a wicked story. He will help you to be brave, if you ask Him."

None of the others heard what she said, but it was easy enough to guess that she was trying to persuade Kate to do right; and Fanny, for once roused to energy, exclaimed,—

"You'll *have* to stand by us, Kate: you can't tell your own share in the mischief without bringing in the rest, and you've no right to do it. And as for you, Bessie, if you bring us into any trouble with your nonsense, we'll keep you out of our room, and have nothing more to do with you. We won't have a mean little tell-tale here spying and reporting us."

But this, as well as many other threats and promises, proved of no avail. Bessie could not

be persuaded to say that she would tell an untruth, if she were asked about the clock ; and the more steadfast she was, the more urgent grew the older girls.

"It is so, Bessie," sighed Kate, all her frolicsome spirits quite put to flight. "It is so : I cannot confess my own share without bringing in Fanny and Mary ; and I don't know that that would be fair, even if I dared to tell of myself. But I tell you what we will do for you, if you promise faithfully—and I know you will keep your word—not to betray us. You are so anxious to have that hospital-bed for your lame Jemmy. Promise to say what we all say, and we will all vote that you shall have that prize ; and I will coax the four girls who are not here to do the same. They will do it for me."

Bessie knew that this was true, for Kate generally carried things her own way in her room. "Maggie, of course, will vote for you : so will Belle and Lily ; and so no one else will have a chance, for that will be more than half the school, and you are sure of the prize. Quick ! speak, Bessie ! There is no time to lose. Monsieur will be back in a moment."

"Think of the good you will do the lame

boy," said Fanny: "and just by such a little—well, you can't call it even a 'fib,' for you *don't* know much about the clock, you don't understand it, and you did not see it break. For all you know, it may be all right in a few moments."

"Then Mrs Ashton won't ask about it, and I needn't speak," said Bessie.

"Pshaw! you always come back to the same point," said Mary. "None of us need speak, if Mrs Ashton does not ask us: need we?"

"Yes," said Bessie. "Some one ought to speak now."

"And who'd be so mean, I'd like to know?" said Fanny.

Bessie had a feeling that the meanness lay elsewhere: first, in the deception practised upon the patient and polite old Frenchman; next, in the concealment of the mischief done from Mrs Ashton. But she did not like to speak out all that was in her mind to these girls who were so much older, and might be supposed to be so much wiser than herself.

"Will you do this for lame Jemmy?" said Kate. "Make haste and tell us! There is no doubt of your gaining the prize for him, if we all promise you our votes, you know."

"You are very wicked and cruel if you do not," said Mary. "How can you ever look the poor fellow in the face again, and remember that you refused to give him a chance of being cured? For if you will not do this little favour for us, you need not look for the votes from this room."

"We don't ask you to say what is not true," said Kate: "you have only to keep silence, if Mrs Ashton speaks. There is nothing wrong in that. Indeed, it is only right for you to do so, when you will gain this great help for your lame friend."

Poor Bessie! It was the first time in all her little life that she had been even tempted to do or say what was not true; but this was a sore trial. She had thought so much of lame Jemmy, longed so to earn the prize for his sake; and now she was sure of it, if she would but—what?

Act a lie! or, at least, help to cover a shameful deception! Yes, it was that! She could not hide the truth from her own conscience. Kate told her that it was right; they were all trying to persuade her to do wrong, that good might come of it,—trying to make her think

that it was really her duty; and for a moment it did seem hard to decide what she ought to do.

But it was only for a moment. Bessie had watched and prayed that she might not enter into temptation; and she was not suffered to fall. Her honest, truthful little soul saw it all clearly. Helping Jemmy was not "God's work," if it led her into sin against Him. Truth first, before all things: to *speak* truth, to *act* truth.

"There!" said Kate, as the child hesitated for that instant: "I thought you'd be a good child, and do as we wanted you to. She promises, girls."

"No," said Bessie, with her colour coming and going, and pressing her little hands tightly together: "I can't, Miss Kate; not even for lame Jemmy,—not even if you never love me any more, or speak to me again. It would not be true."

"It is not telling a story, I tell you," said Kate, sharply, as she heard the rest of the class in the hall below, and knew that in another moment it would be too late.

"But it would be *behaving* a story," said Bessie, "'cause it would be letting Mrs Ashton believe I didn't know about it. I can't see

why it is not just the same; and I know Jesus would be sorry to have me earn the prize for Jemmy that way."

"Go, then," said Kate, suddenly lifting the child down from the desk, and placing her on her feet—"go, then! you are no pet of mine after this: I want nothing more to do with you."

"That won't trouble her," said Mary, with a sneer. "A fine pretence of affection she has made for you, only to serve you in this way, Kate!"

"Bessie, your nurse is waiting for you," said Miss Laura Jones, who just then entered the room. "Why, what is the matter?" as she saw the little one's troubled face, and those of the elder girls flushed and angry.

"The matter is, that here is a mean, hateful, little tell-tale," said Fanny.

"Take care what you do before her, or she will run and tell Mrs Ashton," said Mary.

Ah! how hard it was to keep back the angry words that were rising to her lips; not to tell those great girls what she thought of *them*!

"Why, how is this, my dears?" said Mrs Ashton, coming in, and looking round in surprise. "I thought Monsieur Gaufray was here."

"He did come in, ma'am," said Mary Merton, demurely, and with an air of perfect innocence; "but he had forgotten a book, and thought he had time to go for it."

Mrs Ashton looked at the clock, then took out her watch.

"The clock is too slow," she said. "No, it has stopped! That accounts for his mistake. I must really have it put in order."

Not a word was spoken. Bessie, quite forgetting in her anxiety that Jane was waiting for her, stood looking from one to another, as Mrs Ashton examined the clock, touching it with a kind of reverent affection; but not one of those who were in the secret would meet the child's eye.

Maggie came in to see why Bessie did not come; and feeling as if she could not part with Kate in such an angry mood, the little girl went up to her, and slipped her hand in hers; but Kate pushed her from her, and Bessie turned away with a swelling heart.

Suddenly Julia Grafton, who had not spoken while the others were tempting Bessie, caught the child in her arms as she passed, and kissing her warmly, whispered, "You are right, Bessie: I wish I were as brave as you."

IX.

THE CONFESSION.

MONSIEUR GAUFRAU found his class unusually troublesome that morning. Julia and Kate, generally the two brightest and quickest of all his scholars, seemed now the most inattentive and dull; answering so at random, and appearing to pay so little heed to what they were doing and saying, as to make it very evident that their thoughts were taken up with something quite different from their lessons. As for luckless Fanny, her exercise was only half written, and full of mistakes; and she stumbled through the recitations in a disgraceful manner. Mary Merton could repeat her lessons; but her conduct was careless and defiant, and once, when the professor reproved her slightly, very impertinent.

The old gentleman's patience was quite at an end. Bad marks—sadly deserved, too—went

down to the credit of all four; and the long-threatened complaint to Mrs Ashton was made, including Mary as well as Fanny.

"Much any one has gained by that performance of to-day," said Julia Grafton, as she and her three guilty companions stood together at the corner of the Square, after school was dismissed. "Fanny certainly is no better off, and here are three more of us in trouble through the worry and fuss of it."

"Why don't you preach a sermon on it, and take as a text, 'The way of transgressors is hard'?" said Mary Merton, scornfully.

"And so she might with truth," said Kate. "I am sure we are finding it so."

"Dear me!" said Fanny: "if you think it such an awful sin just to move back the hands of the clock a little, what did you do it for?"

"Because I *did not think*," said Kate, sadly. "Oh! if I only had, I should never have done it. And now how are we to get out of the difficulty? Why didn't I tell Mrs Ashton at once?"

"I do not see where the difficulty is, if only Bessie Bradford does not betray us," said Mary. "Mrs Ashton suspects nothing, and is not

likely to ask any questions now. In spite of my fright, I could not help laughing to see those two complimenting one another. Monsieur bowing and scraping, and assuring Mrs Ashton that he was '*désolé*' at being so late; and Madam, with her gracious air, excusing him, and blaming the poor clock. The only thing I am afraid of is that child."

"She has told it all at home by this time," said Fanny.

"Not she," said Kate. "She promised she wouldn't."

"'Promised!'" repeated Mary: "she only did that because she was afraid of us. I'll answer for it, she told the whole story the moment she was safely with Maggie and her nurse."

"'Afraid!'" repeated Julia in her turn: "I wish any one of us had one half little Bessie's moral courage and simple honesty. We threatened her and tempted her,—and all of us who have seen how eager she is to earn that prize for the lame boy, know how great the temptation was,—but she could not be turned from the straightforward truth. She has shamed us all, girls!"

"Oh! it is very easy for you to talk, Julia Grafton," said Fanny. "You did not touch the clock, and had no hand in the mischief."

"No; or I should feel that I could go at once and tell Mrs Ashton. As it is, I cannot."

"You would have no *right* to do it!" exclaimed Mary, with a look at Kate's downcast face. "It is share and share alike with us. If you chose to bring trouble on yourself, you would have no right to do it, on account of the rest."

"I do not say that I should do it," said Julia. "I have not so much courage as little Bessie. But it is not Mrs Ashton I am afraid of."

"Of course not," said Mary: "you are a favourite with Mrs Ashton. But what are you afraid of, if not of her?"

"Of the ridicule and anger of the rest," said Julia, colouring deeply. "You called Bessie hard names, and threatened to send her to Coventry. You would do the same by me, I suppose, if I do not help you out in this; and I cannot face it as she did, though I own I am ashamed of this cowardice. She felt it too, poor little thing! Kate, did you see her pleading look at you?"

"Yes," answered Kate. "Girls, I wish this day's work could be undone."

"Well, it can't," said Fanny; "and if you think Bessie is safe, I don't see why you fret about it."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Mary, "we must all bind ourselves by a solemn promise not to say a word about it, whether questions are asked or no. Yes, I believe Bessie will keep her word, for we all know how squeamish she is. Mrs Ashton will never suspect her, even if she remembers she was in the room; and the worst we have to fear is some kind of general inquiry, which can easily be passed over. Let us bind one another to silence."

It was done, Mary and Fanny giving their word for this with much energy, Julia more slowly, and Kate with a hesitation and unwillingness which provoked the ridicule of the two first; and then they parted, Mary and Fanny going one way, Kate and Julia another.

Meanwhile Bessie had gone home with a heavy heart. Maggie and Jane both noticed how dull she was, but could not find out what ailed her; though the former seemed rather hurt that Bessie should have any secret from her.

Mrs Bradford, too, saw that her little girl was not in her customary spirits; and when she found that she did not, as usual, give her an account of all that had passed in school that morning, she asked her if she were "in any trouble."

"Yes, mamma," said Bessie. "I have a *very great weight on my mind*, and it makes it worse because I can't tell you; but it is not my own secret, and so I suppose it's not for me to talk about."

"You have not been doing anything wrong in school, dear?"

"No, mamma: I think not. I did *want* to do what was wrong for a moment, 'cause it seemed as if it would be a great help to a good thing; but I asked Jesus to help me to know what He would like me to do, and I think He did let me see it would not be His work if it came by a wicked way."

"But you are not sorry now, dear, that you were not suffered to do wrong that good might come of it?"

"No, mamma: I am very glad, and very much grateful; but I feel sorry about some other people. I think they fell into a very bad temptation, and did not try to get out of it."

"Well, I will not ask you any more, since

you do not feel at liberty to speak about it," said Mrs Bradford.

"I feel very badly not to tell you, mamma; but it was of accident that I was there and saw it, and I did not quite know what was the rightest thing to do where it was not my own secret. And there were a good many troubles about it, and they all came so fast, and it made a great trouble in my mind; and so maybe I made a mistake to say I would not tell you. But, indeed, mamma, I did not mean to be naughty."

"I do not believe you did, my darling; and we will not say another word about it, except that you may always be sure that the safest rule is to have no secrets from your mother."

Mrs Bradford could give a pretty good guess at the cause of Bessie's trouble, though not, of course, at the particulars. She knew that her little girl was a great pet and plaything of the elder scholars; and she saw plainly, from what Bessie had innocently said, that they were in some scrape into which they had tried to draw the child, or at least to make her hide it; and also, that the little one's honest, truthful spirit had been shocked and grieved at the want of honour in her schoolmates. Bessie was thought-

ful and out of spirits all day, and really dreaded the coming of school-time the next morning. But she would not ask her mother to let her stay at home, for she wanted to know for herself if any further trouble had arisen about the clock; and more than this, the brave little soul had a feeling that if she stayed away the girls might think she did so to avoid any questions, and was afraid to tell the truth.

She wondered how Kate Maynard would meet her, and if she would really keep her threat of not speaking to her, or noticing her; and it was with a beating heart that she saw the young lady coming down the street as she and Maggie went up Mrs Ashton's portico the next morning.

But she found that Kate had forgotten her threat, or thought better of it; for she came up and met her as usual. No, not as usual either, for Kate's manner was half hesitating and constrained, as if she were doubtful of the greeting she should receive from Bessie. Her frolicsome spirits seemed to have flown away; and Maggie, looking up to the brilliant black eyes, wondered to see how they had lost their merry light.

Thoughtless and inconsiderate as she was,

Kate Maynard was not accustomed to deceit and meanness, and they sat uneasily upon her conscience.

The children went to their school-room, Kate to hers ; and both her eyes and Bessie's instantly sought the clock. It was gone.

Kate had the back room to herself just then, for those of her class who had arrived were gathered in the hall or cloak-room ; and refusing their invitations to join them, she wandered to the window, and stood listlessly gazing out.

Bessie watched her for a moment through the open doors, and then going up to her, touched her hand, and said in a wistful, pleading tone—

“Katie?”

There was an unspoken question in the one word, and Kate heard and felt it. But she had no answer for it, nor could she meet the clear, steadfast eyes that were raised to her face. She did not withdraw her hand from Bessie's ; but neither did she seem to notice the child, and stood steadily gazing out of the window, but seeing nothing.

Bessie longed to say something, but she did not seem to find words for what was in her

heart; and while she hesitated, the other girls flocked in. Mrs and Miss Ashton came too: the bell was rung, and all must go to their seats.

School was opened; but the folding-doors were not closed as usual, when this was over.

Rapping upon the table with a paper-folder, to call the attention of all in both the rooms, Mrs Ashton began—

“I have a few words to say before the business of the morning commences; but I would first ask if any one here has a confession to make to me.”

She paused for a few moments, while a dead silence reigned in both rooms. Five of the twenty girls gathered there knew well what she meant, but not a voice broke the stillness; while those who were ignorant looked from one to another in great astonishment.

Mrs Ashton went on.

“Yesterday morning the clock, which usually stands upon that mantel-piece, was in good order. I wound and set it with my own hands; but at noon it was found to have stopped, thereby, as all of the older class are aware, misleading Monsieur Gaufrau, and making him late for his lesson. The clock had been wrong once before,

and not wishing it should be so again, I took it to the clockmaker. He examined it before I left the shop, and said at once that it had been seriously injured,—so seriously that it was doubtful if it could be repaired ; and that these injuries had come from a fall or heavy blow, he thought the former ; and that it was quite impossible that the hands, which had stopped at ten minutes past twelve, could have moved after the works had been so shattered. I must therefore believe that the injury was received at that time ; and that, as some, if not all of you, were in the room, that there are those among you who know of it. Most of the little ones had gone home ; I think all but Maggie and Bessie Bradford. Maggie was at her music lesson ; Bessie could not have reached the clock, and I think,—she looked kindly at Bessie,—“I think if any harm had happened to it through her means, that she would have come at once, and confessed it. Therefore, we may put the little girls out of the question ; but if any one among them knows anything and chooses to speak, she may do so, though I shall not compel her.”

Bessie drew a long sigh of relief, and so did more than one of the elder girls.

Poor little child ! She had so dreaded that Mrs Ashton would ask her questions to which she felt that she must give a straightforward and plain answer ; or that she would, at least, say something which would oblige her to speak, and own that she had been in the room, and seen the accident.

And Bessie was as unwilling as any little girl could be, to draw upon herself the ill-will of her schoolmates. She wanted to be loved by all about her ; and, as you know, was an affectionate, clinging child, accustomed to be petted and treated with all tenderness. So her little heart had been very downcast at the thought of the cold looks and words, and unkind behaviour, which she feared would fall to her share if she should feel herself obliged to tell what she knew ; and she was very grateful to Mrs Ashton for sparing her from this.

The lady paused again to give any one who chose to speak the opportunity to do so ; but all were silent.

“ I shall put the question to each of you in turn,” said Mrs Ashton, “ trusting that none of you are so hardened as to tell a deliberate falsehood, however you may have reconciled your

consciences to a deceitful silence. Ella Leroy, did you break the clock, or have you any knowledge of how it was done ?”

Mrs Ashton’s manner was stern, and her tone severe, as they were apt to be when she was displeased ; and all of the little girls felt thankful that they were not to be questioned. Maggie thought she could not possibly have answered as much as “ No ;” and it frightened her even to hear Mrs Ashton’s voice.

But Ella Leroy answered promptly,—

“ No, ma’am.”

“ Bertha Stockton, do you ? ”

“ No, ma’am.”

“ Mary Merton, do you ? ”

“ No, ma’am,” came, with equal readiness, from Mary’s lips.

Bessie’s heart beat fast, and for a moment her eyes fell as though she herself had been the guilty one.

One or two more answered with truth that they knew nothing of the matter, and then,—

“ Fanny Berry ? ” said Mrs Ashton.

“ No, ma’am,” answered Fanny, but not as boldly as Mary had done ; for she was not used to open falsehood, and it did not come readily to

her. Mrs Ashton looked steadily at her for a moment; then passed on to the next.

“Kate Maynard?”

To the astonishment of all, to the anger of some, and to the relief and delight of one little heart, Kate rose slowly, and answered, “Yes, ma’am.”

“You know who did it?”

“I did it myself, madam.”

Mrs Ashton looked grieved as well as surprised.

“You, Kate? and yet you kept silence when I asked for confession?”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Kate, steadily, yet not boldly or defiantly after her usual manner of receiving reproof from her teachers; “and I am afraid I should still have kept silence, if you had not asked me so directly.”

“I did not look for this from you, Kate,” said Mrs Ashton, slowly. “Heedless as I know you to be, I did not believe you capable of even an acted deceit.”

Kate hung her head in shame, thinking that she not only would have been guilty of this herself, but that she had tried to draw an innocent young child into the same sin. But the little

one had stood firmly to the right, refusing in her own simple language, even to "behave a story." And the trial and temptation had been far greater in her case than in that of her older schoolmates. The last proof of her steadfastness had, happily for her, not been needed; but Kate knew well enough, that neither would that have failed, had it been called for.

"How did it happen?" asked Mrs Ashton.

"I had the clock in my hands," answered Kate, "and, as I went to put it in its place, it fell from them."

"And how came you to have the clock in your hands? What were you doing with it?"

"I wanted to put back the hands."

"And why, may I ask?" said Mrs Ashton, in astonishment. "Did you imagine that I should not find that the clock was wrong?"

"I—we—I," stammered Kate, fearing to betray the others who would not speak for themselves, and yet feeling that she could scarcely avoid doing so—"I wanted Monsieur Gaufrau to be—to think he was too early, so as to gain a little more time before the French lesson."

"And one acted deceit thus led to another," said Mrs Ashton. "It is generally the way.

Your lessons were not ready then, I take it; and you wished *dishonestly*, yes, *dishonestly*, Kate, to gain more time to prepare them."

"My lessons for Monsieur Gaufrau were ready," said Kate, in a low voice.

"Then you have not even this poor excuse, but were guilty of this foolish deception merely that you might have a few minutes more for play and idle talk. You will remain and see me after school. Had any of the others any part in it?"

"Excuse me, madam," said Kate. "I have answered for myself. Allow the rest to do the same."

Bessie could hardly keep still. Pity for Kate,—for going to Mrs Ashton after school seemed a very terrible thing to the little children, who were all rather in awe of the lady's grave, somewhat stern manner,—indignation at those who were allowing more than her own share of blame to fall on her, and the strong desire to come to her relief by telling what she knew, were almost too much for the little girl. But she could not break her promise to say nothing unless she were asked, and so felt obliged to hold her peace.

Mrs Ashton passed on to the next.

"Julia Grafton, had you any hand in this?"


"I knew of it, ma'am; but I had nothing more than that to do with it."

"Julia forgets," said Kate, quickly. "She tried to dissuade me from it, but I would not listen. She was not at all to blame, Mrs Ashton."

Fanny could keep silence no longer; her better feelings mastered her shame and fear, and rising, she stammered out, "I—I—Mrs Ashton—it was me—my lesson—I was not ready—it was my fault—I suggested"—and here Fanny's voice was lost amid tears and sobs.

Bessie began to cry too: Maggie put her arms about her and joined in, and Belle and Lily each put up a grieved lip in sympathy. Miss Ashton, seeing the disturbed state of her little flock, rose hastily, and after whispering to her mother, closed the doors; and no more was heard of what passed in the other room.

Miss Ashton had wished from the first that the elder girls should be examined without the knowledge of the little ones, but her mother had decided otherwise; and the great Teacher



above had overruled her wish for His own purposes, for He had a little instrument of His own unconsciously working for Him, and leading a wavering heart into the ways of truth by the light of her own steady example.

But Miss Ashton, knowing nothing of this, was sorry that her lambs had heard so much ; especially when she found that their minds were quite distracted, and that it was almost impossible to settle them to the business of the day. She had to overlook a good many things that morning.

She was all the more sorry when, as Maggie and Bessie were going down-stairs with Jane, on their way home, she heard the former say, " Bessie, I'm not going to say anything unkind about Mrs Ashton ; but when I say my prayers to-night, I'm just going to tell 'our Father' how very thankful I am that He did not give her to me for my teacher. I'm very sure she'd bring down my hair with sorrow to the grave, if she was."

X.

A LITTLE LIGHT.

BESSIE would have liked to have had a word or two with Kate during recess, but when she peeped into the other room she saw all the rest of the girls gathered around her; and not caring to talk, or to be talked to by them, she ran away again without being noticed, and followed her sister down to the music-room.

The girls of the older class were all in a state of great excitement over the trouble of the morning. Some were anxious, some pitying, some saying that Mrs Ashton was making a great fuss about a trifle. Fanny Berry, who had been weeping and sobbing at intervals through all the lesson-hours, was now drowned in a fresh flood of tears, and bewailing her hard fate in having to go to Mrs Ashton "for a lecture" after school.

"And I suppose she'll complain to my father,

too," she moaned. "She has been saying she would do so the next time any of the masters reported me; and now she'll tell him this,—the hateful old thing!—and he won't let me go to the birthday-party at my aunt's. Oh, Kate! why did you tell? You promised you would not; you *promised*! Of course, I could not let Mrs Ashton go on giving you more than your own share of blame, and so I was forced to speak. It's just as Mary said it would be if any one told their own part. It must needs bring the rest into trouble; and after we two had denied it too! You *ought* to have stood by us."

"Were you in it too, Mary?" asked Ella Leroy; and she, as well as most of the others, looked at Mary in shocked surprise. To some of them, it was no very great matter that the four who had had any share in the accident to the clock should shrink from confessing it, or even keep silence when Mrs Ashton had asked who had done it; but a deliberate denial of their guilt was quite another thing. They deservedly blamed Fanny for her first falsehood; but they had the feeling that she had half redeemed her sin when she had, at the risk of such shame

and mortification to herself, acknowledged that, and her former fault, rather than allow Kate to receive a more severe reproof than she merited. But Mary, who it seemed had been as much to blame as the others, had not even then been shamed into telling the truth, and had still let Mrs Ashton believe her innocent.

She was heartily ashamed of it now; but she did not choose to let that be seen, and carried matters with a high hand, tossing her head, and declaring that *she* was "not going to be such a fool as to get herself into difficulty just because Kate and Fanny chose to do it." She reproached Kate bitterly for breaking her promise, and so did Fanny; both saying that all would have been well if she had not done so.

"I am sorry," said Kate, taking their upbraidings with a meekness quite unusual in her—"I am very sorry for the punishment I have brought upon you, girls; but not sorry that I did not—tell a lie."

"You should have thought of that before," said Mary, "and not let Fanny and me tell what you so elegantly called *a lie*, and then set yourself up for being so truthful."

"I do not set myself up for being truthful,"

said Kate, colouring deeply; "at least I *have* not, but with God's help, I will from this day," and she looked steadily into Mary's angry face. "I wish, oh, how I wish! I had spoken when Mrs Ashton asked the general question of the whole class, or that she had asked me first, and even to the moment when she called my name, I meant to deny it; but I could not with Bessie Bradford's eyes upon me."

"Bessie Bradford! little Bessie! and what had she to do with it?" asked two or three of the girls.

"She had this much to do with it," said Kate, "that she was in the room yesterday when the clock was broken; and when we resolved to hide it, we tried to make her as deceitful as ourselves; but we tempted, threatened, and promised in vain. *She* was not to be frightened into wrong for fear of the consequences of doing right; and as Julia said, she, baby as she is, shamed us all. Yes, shamed *me* at least, and made me feel what a mean coward I was beside her."

"You are a coward, to be sure, if you are afraid of Bessie Bradford, or what she could do or say," said Mary, pretending to misunderstand Kate.

"I was not afraid of anything she would *say* or *do*," said Kate, not noticing the contemptuous tone; "but of what she would *think* of me, of losing her affection and respect. But,"—she went on more slowly as if half ashamed, yet determined to speak out,—“that was not all I was afraid of.”

"What else then?" asked Mary.

"Of offending Bessie's Master," said Kate. She felt it was a bold avowal to make in the presence of all her classmates,—for her who had always been so reckless and careless, sometimes even irreverent; but she said it, and that with a gravity which showed she meant it, and that it was no light feeling which had called it forth.

It was received in astonished silence by the rest. Words like these were so new from Kate, and there was no need for any one of them to ask what Master Bessie served. The daily life of the little child showed to all about her whose work she delighted to do in her own simple way, which knew no other rule than what would be pleasing and true to Him.

"But, Kate," said Ella, presently, "you don't mean that *you* call Him your Master?"

"No," said Kate: "I pretend to nothing of

the sort, and you know it; but when I saw Bessie waiting for my answer, and knew of what and of whom she was thinking, I could not help feeling that another ear was listening and waiting too; and so—I dared not. There!” and Kate drew up her head defiantly. “You may laugh at me, you may sneer at me, you may call this humbug; but it is what I felt, and why I answered as I did, and I am not ashamed to own it. I tell you, because you feel, some of you, that I have meanly broken my promise. It was a *mean* thing to make it: it would have been meaner to keep it than it was to break it; and it was better to be false to that promise than false to my own conscience and to God. But I never meant to betray any one but myself; and, Fanny, I am only too sorry if you are worse punished for what I have done;” and she held out her hand to her schoolmate.

Fanny was vexed as well as distressed, but she could not resist Kate’s frankness; and she laid her hand in hers, saying, “I suppose I ought not to complain: it was my fault in the first place.”

Not one of the girls had laughed, not one had sneered; not one but had been more or less

touched by Kate's unusual earnestness, and the way in which she had set herself to atone for her past fault.

"Kate would think we were all perfect, if we took Bessie Bradford for our pattern," said one, half jokingly, but not unkindly.

"Not exactly," said Kate, smiling; "but I believe if we took Bessie's standard of right and wrong, and tried to follow it as truly as she does, we should not go far out of the way. I would not be ashamed to have it said that I had profited by such an example. If her light is a little one, it burns very clearly."

"But if Bessie had been guilty herself, do you believe it would have been so impossible to tempt her?" said Fanny. "If she had expected to be punished, would she have been so ready to confess?"

"Have you forgotten the japonica?" asked Kate. "I thought of that too."

"What japonica?" said Fanny.

"Oh, true! you were not at school that day," answered Kate, laughing at the recollection. "I will tell you."

Now this was the story, and as I know more about it than Kate, I will tell you myself, instead

of giving it in her words ; and to do this I must go some way back.

Miss Ashton was in the habit of giving a few moments of recreation during the morning to her four younger scholars. Sometimes, if the day were pleasant, she let them run on the piazza or in the old garden ; and when she did this, she used to ring for Marcia, the servant girl, to come and help the children to put on their things. Bessie did not like this girl, she could not tell exactly why ; but she had, as yet, never allowed this dislike to make her rude or unkind to Marcia.

But one day when she was down in the music-room with Maggie and Miss Ashton, she saw Marcia do something which she thought gave her good reason for her dislike. The cook had set a dish of stewed pears on the edge of the piazza to cool ; and Bessie saw Marcia steal out from the kitchen, and take three of the pears, swallowing them, one after the other, as fast as possible, and then run away. She told Maggie of this, but they agreed they would not "tell tales about it" to any one else.

From that time Bessie would never suffer Marcia to do anything for her. She would rather stay in the house than allow the girl to

put on her cloak or shoes ; rather go thirsty than take a glass of water from her hand.

One morning, about a week before the affair of the clock, Harry said at breakfast, "Papa, the police caught a lot of burglars round in the next street last night."

"What are burglars?" asked Maggie.

"Thieves and robbers, who go about breaking into people's houses, and taking what does not belong to them," said Harry.

"And did they come into the next street to ours?" asked timid Maggie, with wide-open eyes.

"Yes; but you needn't be afraid. They wouldn't take you any way, and they 'most always get found out, and taken to prison," said Harry, thinking more of comforting Maggie than of sticking closely to facts.

"We know a burglar that hasn't been found out, and taken to prison: don't we, Maggie?" said Bessie, gravely. "She *burgles* very badly too, and when she has done, she licks her fingers."

The boys shouted, and the grown people could not help laughing too.

"Don't be vexed, my little daughter," said papa, as he saw the cloud of displeasure overshadow Bessie's face. "Come and sit here

on my knee, and tell us what your burglar did."

"She's not mine at all, papa; and I am glad she is not, for I don't like her, and she is wicked too. Mrs Ashton thinks she is good, but she went and burgled three pears out of the dish, and eat them up."

The boys were more amused than ever, and kept up their laughter till their father told them the joke had lasted long enough; but he had so much difficulty in keeping his own face straight as he thought of Bessie's indignant tone and look, and of the way in which she had used the word, that he did not try to explain its proper meaning to her just then; and smiling he kissed her, and said gently, "If she goes on doing such things, Bessie, she will be found out in time, and punished too, though she may not be taken to prison."

When the little girls went to school, they found Mrs Ashton in the cloak-room, tending a stand of plants which she had just placed in the window.

"I hope none of you will hurt my plants," she said. "They need the sun, and this is the best place for them, so I shall trust that you will be careful and not touch them. There, I shall

put this bench here, and none of you must on the other side of it. I would not have th broken for a great deal, especially this wl japonica."

The one pure white blossom upon the pl was certainly a beauty, and the children did wonder that Mrs Ashton was careful of it.

The day was so mild and lovely, that wl Miss Ashton sent the little ones out for th fifteen minutes' play, she told them that tl had all better put their things on, and run in the fresh air; and, as usual on such occasic she rang for Marcia to come and help them.

Bessie would not let the girl do anything her; but as she was very anxious to go into garden with her playmates, she tried her best put on her own things. With Belle's help, contrived to put on her hat and cloak; but, e with the aid of the other two, it was found n to impossible to manage those troublesome legg with all their numberless buttons; and it took long that, at last, Miss Ashton, hearing tl voices, came to tell them that they were los too much time, and must go down at once.

She found Bessie sitting on the bench wl stood before the flowers, and the other th

little girls all tugging and pulling away at one leggin, while Marcia stood leaning against the door, and laughing.

"Bessie," said the lady, "why do you not let Marcia do that for you? I want you to go down at once."

"I don't want Marcia to do it," answered Bessie.

"You must let her, or else stay in the house," said Miss Ashton. "I cannot have the others kept from their play to help you."

"We like to help her," said Belle.

"You must go out at once, Bessie. Will you let Marcia help you, or no?"

"No," said Bessie, with a pout; for she was not in a good humour that morning, and she felt as if her dislike to Marcia were very strong. "She shan't touch me, and I'd rather stay in the house."

"Very well," said Miss Ashton: "I am sorry you are so naughty, but the rest must go."

She sent the others away, and Marcia after them, and went back to her room, leaving Bessie alone. The little girl sat still for two or three moments, feeling very angry, and swelling with pride and impatience; thinking that Miss Ashton

was very unkind, and Marcia, oh, so wicked! And she wished she had never come to school even for Maggie's sake.

Presently she saw the girl's head peep round the door at her. Marcia was good-natured if she was not very trustworthy; and she was sorry when she thought of Bessie sitting all alone, and so she had come back to see if the little lady would not be glad of her help after

"Go away," said Bessie, angrily.

"Don't little miss want Marcia put 'em now?" said Marcia.

"No, I don't: go away," said Bessie; and when she spoke, she raised one of her leggins which she held in her hand, as though she would throw it at Marcia. The girl laughed and disappeared, leaving Bessie feeling, the next instant, very much ashamed; and then a very sad thing happened.

The leggin had caught on something behind her, and she turned her head to see what it was, giving it at the same time an impatient pull. One of the buttons had caught upon the stem of the japonica, and alas! alas! as she twitched it away, the white blossom was broken short off, and fell upon the floor.



*'Go away,' said Bessie; and as she spoke, she raised one of her
ings, as though she would have thrown it at Marcia..."—P. 100.*



Ah ! how frightened the poor child was when she saw what she had done. The flower had fallen behind the window-curtain, where it might have lain for a long time without being noticed ; and, with all the people who were going and coming in this room, it might easily have seemed that it had been broken without the knowledge of the person who did it. But no thought of concealment entered Bessie's little heart ; and after one moment's pause of astonishment and alarm, she picked up the broken flower, and ran with it to Mrs Ashton's room.

The lady was just preparing to hear a recitation, when a fumbling was heard at the lock, as though a small hand were trying to turn it ; then the door opened, and Bessie appeared. One hand was held behind her ; and she stood looking up at Mrs Ashton, with her colour coming and going.

"Well, Bessie, what is it?" asked Mrs Ashton.

"Ma'am," said Bessie, and then she stopped, and drew a long breath.

"Have you any message?" asked Mrs Ashton, who was near-sighted, and did not *notice the expression of the child's face.*

"No, ma'am," said Bessie; "but"——

"Then run away. Why do you interrupt us now?"

"Because I have to make trouble for you, ma'am," said the poor little thing.

"That is just what I do not wish you to do. If you have anything to say, you may tell me by and by."

"I'll *have* to tell you now, or you might think somebody else did it," said Bessie; and as she spoke, she drew her hand from behind her, and showed the broken flower. "I'm very sorry, ma'am, but I broke your flower."

Mrs Ashton's pale face flushed angrily, then grew calm again.

"How did that happen, Bessie? Did I not tell you not to touch the flowers?"

"Yes, ma'am," answered the child, the tears beginning to run slowly down her cheeks; "and I didn't mean to touch them, and I didn't go on the other side of the bench. It was with my leggin,—I don't quite know how; but it was 'cause I was naughty. I was angry with Marcia, and was going to throw my leggin at her; and *somehow* it knocked the flower and broke it. *But I know I did it; and I thought I ought to*

tell you very quick, or you might think it was Marcia, or some one else."

"I am glad you are so honest, Bessie," said Mrs Ashton. "Put the flower down, and I will talk to you about it by and by."

Bessie laid the japonica on the table, and turned to go, then turned back again.

"Ma'am," she said, "if you are going to scold me, would you have objections to do it now? I think the young ladies would just as well wait, and I don't like to think about it so long."

The young ladies had all been listening to the child, and feeling great sympathy for her in her trouble; while they could not help admiring her straightforward truthfulness, and generous fear lest another should be blamed for her fault; but at this speech, every book in the class went up before the owner's face to hide the smiles which could not be repressed. Even the corners of Mrs Ashton's grave mouth gave way a little.

"I am not going to scold you, Bessie," she said. "I will never scold any one who truthfully confesses an accident; so I shall say no more about the flower. But what makes you *so* pettish and unkind to Marcia? You do not

behave well to her. Has she done anything to you ?”

“No, ma’am, not to me,” said Bessie, drying her tears.

“To Maggie or Belle then ? I know she is mischievous sometimes, and I will not let her annoy you ; but you must not behave so to her.”

“She did not annoy any of us, ma’am. She is very good to us, only I don’t let her help me.”

“Why not, if she does not trouble you ?”

“I can’t approve her : she is too wicked,” said Bessie.

“What makes you think so ?” asked the lady, who saw there was something at the bottom of all this, and thought it better to settle the difficulty at once.

“She is a burglar,” said Bessie, solemnly.

“A *what* ?” exclaimed Mr Ashton.

Now, as we know, our Maggie and Bessie were both fond of a long word ; and as soon as they understood, or thought they understood, the meaning of one, put it in use on every occasion. And besides, Bessie thought it sounded better to ears polite, to use the new one she had heard *that morning*, than it did to say thief or steal ; *so she answered,—*

"She *is*, ma'am. Maybe you don't know it, but she *is* a burglar. I saw her burgle three pears out of your dish; and she put her fingers in the dish too, and then licked every one of them!"

The emphatic tone of disgust in which these last words were uttered, and the expression of the child's face, told that the uncleanness of the trick, as well as its sinfulness, had gone far to horrify her.

The whole thing—look, tone, and words—was irresistible. All discipline was at an end; and Mrs Ashton herself could not help joining in the merry laugh that was raised by the class.

Bessie would have been angry again; but the thought of her late passion, its sad consequences, and her present repentance, kept her temper in check, and she stood silent. Mrs Ashton recollected herself, and raised a warning finger to the amused line of girls before her, as she saw Bessie's disturbed face; and drawing the child to her, she kissed the grieved lips, and said kindly—

"I am sorry Marcia did such a naughty thing, Bessie; but she has not been as well taught as some of us; and we all do wrong

sometimes, and need forgiveness from one another as well as from God."

"Yes, ma'am," answered Bessie, meekly; "and I was very naughty to be so angry. Please to 'scuse me, and I'll try not to be cross to Marcia again. And I am very sorry about your flower."

"I shall not care about my flower, if it serves to teach you a lesson," said the lady. "That is quite forgiven; and you need not distress yourself over it. Now you may go."

Bessie drew Mrs Ashton's head down to her.

"And may I go and tell Marcia I am sorry I was so angry with her?" she whispered.

"Certainly," said Mrs Ashton; and Bessie went away.

Mrs Ashton waited a moment till her class had settled into quiet, and then, taking up the broken flower, she said—

"I do not regret the time spared from the recitation which this little incident has occupied. The loss of my flower has furnished lessons to more than little Bessie; lessons which we will *all* do well to lay to heart, and which may prove *of far* more value than that which we should

have learned from our books. I trust they may not be lost."

So much of all this as had come to her own knowledge, Kate told to Fanny, who laughed with the others, but found in the story fresh cause to feel ashamed that she had been so far outdone in truth and generosity by a little child.

The dreaded interview with Mrs Ashton took place after school. Kate and Fanny found her more grieved than angry, more hurt at their deceit and want of confidence in her, than at the injury to her clock. She talked long and seriously to them, not failing to point out the difference between their conduct and that of little Bessie; and she was both touched and gratified, when Kate told, not without tears, of the part they had acted towards the child, and of the influence of the little one's example in leading her to confession and repentance.

Mrs Ashton told the girls that she should inflict no further punishment upon them than an apology to Monsieur Gaufray, and a confession of the deception that had been practised upon him; and she was still better pleased when Kate told her that this had already been done, and that she had, in her own name and

Fanny's, begged his pardon before the whole class.

"For," said she, with many blushes, "as long as I had started on the right track, I thought I would not stop half way."

"Then do not stop half way, and do not turn back, my child," said Mrs Ashton, holding out her hand to the young girl; "you have farther, much farther to go, Kate, before you reach the goal. Oh! take heed that your steps turn neither to the right nor to the left from the way of truth and uprightness!"

XI.

ABOUT "OUR FATHER'S" WORK.

"UP, up," said the baby, "up, up."

Baby sat upon the hearth-rug in her mother's room, with her playthings about her; and Maggie sat beside her, writing away upon her slate.

If you had asked Maggie what she was doing, she would probably have said, "Taking care of Baby;" for that was what her mother had asked her to do, and what she really believed herself to be doing. But perhaps Baby would have given a different opinion.

"Up, up, wee, wee," said the little one again, pulling away at Maggie's skirt.

"Yes, darling, by and by. Oh! see, see Baby's pretty dolly!" and putting the doll in her little sister's lap, Maggie turned again to her slate. Baby took dolly by the heels, and thumped her head upon the floor,—it was well dolly was not *subject to headaches*; then she scolded her, then

kissed her, and sung and petted her to sleep, then put the doll's cool china head in her own heated little mouth; and, at last, tiring of all these, threw her down, and took hold of Maggie again with that pitiful, beseeching, "Up, up."

"Now, Maggie dear, just put by your writing, and take Baby up, and tell her 'the little pig that went to market,'" said nurse. "She's fretful with her teeth, and they hurt her so this morning. Yes, my pet: your nursey will take ye, and tell ye pigs without end, as soon as she gets this naughty boy dressed."

The naughty boy was Frankie, who had undertaken to give Baby's woolly lamb a shower-bath, and not being able to reach the tap, had climbed into the bath-tub, where he had turned it to such purpose as to shower, not only the lamb, but himself from head to foot. Frankie was too well used to the consequences of such pranks, to mind them very much; but, as usual, he had chosen a time when it was not very convenient to attend to him.

This was Saturday morning. Jane was sweeping the nursery, nurse sorting the clean clothes, Mrs Bradford petting her fretful baby, and Maggie very busy over that prize composition;

while Bessie was in her own room, dressing the dolls, and putting the baby-house in order; for Belle Powers and Lily Norris were coming to spend the day, and all must be ready for them. So every one was very busy, and that, of course, must be the time for Frankie to get into mischief.

Then, just as nurse began to take off his wet clothes, a lady came to see Mrs Bradford on business, and she had to go down-stairs; so, putting Baby down on the rug, mamma told Maggie to amuse her till she came back. But Maggie, having brought some toys for her little sister, thought she had done enough, and went on with her writing.

But Baby was not in a mood to amuse herself. She wanted to be taken up, and told that wonderful story about the well-known family of little pigs, which mamma had been telling upon her tiny fingers when she was called away.

And Maggie?

Maggie was trying to make two things agree, her duty and her inclination. Sometimes these go very well together; but on this occasion they did not. Maggie strove to persuade herself that the last was the first; but neither Baby, nurse, nor her conscience, would let her deceive herself

so, and she did not feel well pleased with either of the three monitors.

"I'll take her when I've finished this idea," said Maggie. "There, Baby, play with the pretty blocks."

"Bad bocky," said Baby, striking out with her little foot at the pile of blocks before her. Just then Bessie peeped around the door; and seeing that the baby was restless and discontented, and nurse busy, she came to do what she could for her little sister's amusement.

"Bessie make her nice house," she said, thinking that was what the child wanted; and she began piling the blocks on one another in a tower, which Baby was to have the pleasure of knocking down when it should be finished, talking to her the while in a coaxing, chirruping voice.

Baby put three fingers into her mouth, and sat watching Bessie for a few moments, when suddenly bethinking herself once more of the adventures of those famous pigs, and of the coveted seat upon Maggie's lap, she dashed over the half-built tower, and turning again towards Maggie, fretted, "Up, up, wee, up."

Bessie, willing to save Maggie from interruption, took the small hand in her own, and began

the oft-repeated tale ; but neither did this answer. Baby, like many older people when they are ill, ay, and when they are well too, was not to be satisfied with anything but that on which she had, for the moment, set her fancy. Maggie's lap and Maggie's attention were the only things that could please her just then, and she could see no reason why she should not have them.

"Oh, you little bother ! I shan't take you, and you can just let Bessie play with you, now !" said Maggie : "I am not going to stop my work just for such nonsense. Bessie can tell the pig that 'went to market' as well as I can ; and she is not busy."

Baby might not understand the words, but she understood the tone, and knew very well that she was being scolded ; and she put up a pitiful, grieved lip, which would have made Maggie feel sorry if she had seen it. But her eyes were bent upon her slate, not once turned towards little Annie.

Bessie looked from one sister to the other, and then said gently,—

"Maggie dear, do you think you are doing the work 'our Father' has given you to do *now* ?"

Maggie coloured, and looked more vexed than

she had done before, hesitated an instant, and then, as the cloud passed from her face, said—

“No, Bessie, I am not; but I just will do it;” and in another moment Baby was in the long-wished-for place, and that first little pig who went to market travelled there so many times that I think he would have been glad to be the brother who stayed at home.

Mamma came back just as nurse was through with Frankie, and said, as she took the now contented baby from Maggie, “You are my own dear, obliging little girl. I was sorry to interrupt you, but you see it could not be helped.”

“But I was not obliging or kind at all, mamma,” said Maggie; “at least, not at first. I felt real provoked 'cause I had to take care of Baby, and I believe I would have let her cry if it hadn't been for Bessie, who put me in mind I was giving place to my own work, instead of God's. I s'pose it was God's work to amuse Baby, even if it did not seem half so useful a thing as writing my composition: was it not, mamma?”

“Certainly, dear; and I am glad you saw *that*.”

“Oh! it was not my praise at all, but Bessie's,

mamma. She is an excellent *reminder*; and if I had not her, I expect I should be an awful child."

"I trust not, dear," said her mother, smiling.

"But, Maggie dear," said Bessie, as her sister took up her slate once more, "I'm 'fraid you have something else to do. I think Marigold is hungry, and has no seed in his cup. You did not feed him this morning, did you?"

Maggie uttered an exclamation, and clapping her hand over her mouth, after the manner of little girls on such occasions, turned to meet her mother's half-mournful, half-reproachful look, and then ran away to her own room, followed by Bessie.

Poor little Marigold! It was easy to be seen that he was in a sad way about something, and a peep into his cage soon showed the cause. As the children came in, he was making a loud but mournful chirping, as if he wanted to call attention to himself; and when he saw them, he commenced fluttering his wings, and stretching out his neck towards them.

"Oh, you poor little birdie!" said Maggie; "did your naughty, ought-to-be-ashamed-of-herself Maggie forget all about you this morning?"

Yes, Bessie : his seed-cup is empty, and he has not had fresh water or anything. And it just came 'cause I was in such a hurry to get to my composition. Oh, dear ! I wonder if I am too anxious about it. You see, Bessie, it was this way. When Jane called me to feed him, I was just going to write, and I did not want to come at all, and thought I would wait ; but then I remembered how mamma said if she let me attend to him, I must promise to attend to him *faithfully* every morning : so I ran as quick as I could for the seed-box and a lump of sugar (for I saw yesterday his sugar was all gone), and I was in such a hurry that I let the box fall, and spilled all the seed ; and it took me so long to pick it up ; but all the time I was thinking about a very good idea I had, and now I remember I just went and put the box away, and forgot to give Marigold any seed. And there is the lump of sugar lying on the chair, and his water-cup is empty too. Poor little fellow ! just see how hungry he is, Bessie ! If his instinct tells him it was I who did it to him, I wonder if he'll forgive me, and love me any more."

Marigold was certainly very hungry, but he *did not* seem to feel unforgiving, or to bear any

grudge against his repentant little mistress; for, as he picked up seed after seed, and opened them with his sharp beak, he watched the children with his bright, black eyes as lovingly as usual, giving, every now and then, when he could spare the time, a cheerful chirp, which seemed to say, "Thank you: you have made amends for past neglect."

Maggie and Bessie stood and looked at him till he had made a good breakfast, and fallen to dressing his feathers; and then ran back to their mother's room, where the former told her how she had come so sadly to forget her duty that morning, a duty which she had, with many pleadings and promises, persuaded mamma to let her undertake, and which she had, till this unlucky day, never neglected.

"Mamma," she said, "do you think you will have to take away the charge of Marigold from me?"

"Not now, Maggie," said Mrs Bradford. "You have been so faithful to him ever since you had him, that I shall not punish you for this one failure. But it must not happen again, my dear; for even if I thought it best to overlook such carelessness, it would be cruel and

wrong for me to let the bird suffer through your fault."

"If I forget him again, mamma, I am sure I shall be very deserving of having you say Jane must take care of him; but I think this will keep me in mind. And I see quite well now how being so very anxious about my prize composition could make me careless about God's work. I have been in such a hurry with it this morning, because Gracie has a whole page of hers written, and I did not want her to be so much ahead of me. For, mamma, all the girls think now that one of us two will have the prize. None of the others think they have any chance; and I believe Miss Ashton thinks we are both too anxious about it, for yesterday Gracie was writing while we were at our arithmetic lesson, and Miss Ashton told her 'one thing at a time;' and after school, she said that she was afraid some of the class were thinking too much about their compositions when they should be attending to other things; and I knew she meant Gracie and me, least I'm quite sure she meant *me*. And I would know it by to-day if I had not known it before," said Maggie, gravely shaking her head as she thought of her

shortcomings of the morning. "Now, mamma, what plan do you think I could take to better myself of this?"

Mrs Bradford could hardly help smiling at the air of grave importance with which this was said; but she saw that Maggie was quite in earnest, and meant what she said about correcting herself.

"I think, dear," she answered, "that the best way for you is to make sure each day that you have done everything else you have to do, before you take up your composition. When one duty is more pleasant than another, and one feels that one is apt to give too much place to it, it is better to put that last, and only to take it up when other work is done; and perhaps, as you have allowed the composition to tempt you into wrong, more than once this morning, it would be well to put it away for to-day. I do not say you *must* do this; but do you not think it would help you to be more careful another time?"

"Yes, mamma," said Maggie, rather ruefully, and with a longing look at the slate; but presently she took it up, and went cheerfully to put it away.

"Mamma," said Bessie, "I think Maggie is *very* good about her composition, even if it does

make her forget other things sometimes. She is not half so *jealous* about it as I am. Sometimes when I think about Gracie having the prize, it makes me feel very angry and cross with her. I don't think she will have it; but then she *might*, you know; and I don't think I could bear that for Maggie."

"But you must *try* to be willing, dear," said her mother, "and not have that feeling towards Gracie. It does not make you act unkindly to her, does it?"

"It did the other day in school, mamma. She had lost her pencil, and she asked me to lend her mine, and 'cause I knew she wanted it for her composition, I spoke very cross, and told her 'No;' but then she looked so very surprised at me, that I was sorry and gave it to her, and we kissed and made it up. But, mamma, if one of your little girls did not have a prize, would you not feel rather mortified?"

"Not in the least, dear, if I thought my little girls had done as well as they could. If they had been idle, or disobedient, or untruthful, and so lost all chance of a prize, then indeed I should have been mortified and grieved; but if they had done their best, I should not

feel at all troubled because others had done better."

"And would not papa, mamma?"

"No: he will be quite satisfied if he knows that you have tried to do what is right."

"I'm 'fraid I shouldn't, mamma," said Bessie, drawing a long sigh; "if Gracie has the composition prize, not one will come to Maggie or me; and when I think about it, I am quite dis-encouraged."

"But I do not want you to be discouraged, dearest, any more than I want you to be too eager. How is it that you have no hope of the other prizes for yourself or Maggie?"

"I could not have the 'perfect-lesson prize,' mamma, 'cause I do not have so many to say as the others; and Maggie has not had so many perfect marks as some of the rest."

"But that prize to be given by the choice of the school,—has my Bessie given up all thought of that?" said Mrs Bradford.

"Not the *thought* of it, mamma; but I have not a bit of hope of it. I think maybe Belle will have it; for she has been very good and sweet almost all the time. She does not break the rules, and all the little girls and the young

ladies like her. She says if it comes to her, she will give it to lame Jemmy, so that will be as good for him as if one of us had it; but I would have liked to think that Maggie or I had earned it for him."

"Yes," said Mrs Bradford, "it would have been very pleasant; and I should have liked to think that the good behaviour and amiability of one of my little daughters had been of such service to Jemmy. But why do you think there is no hope that the prize will come to you, darling? You have not broken the rules so often, or had any trouble with your playmates, have you?"

"I don't think I have broken the rules, mamma; but I have been naughty sometimes. I broke Mrs Ashton's flower, you know, and two or three times I was passionate with the girls; but I believe they don't think about that now, and some of them say they shall vote for me."

"'Most all of them will," said Maggie, who had come back, and now stood listening: "'most all of our class will, and I think a good many of the young ladies."

"No, not one," said Bessie, shaking her head *decidedly*.

"I don't see how you can be so sure," said Maggie; "and, Bessie, all the young ladies are very fond of you; and Miss Julia said you were the best child in the school."

"They have *reasons*, Maggie," said Bessie, gravely; and then, turning to her mother, she added, "Mamma, don't you think it seems strange that God sometimes punishes us for doing right?"

"I do not think He does, dear. God never punishes us for doing His will."

"No, mamma. I do not quite mean that. I s'pose *punish* was not just the right word; but I mean He lets a great disappointment come to us sometimes, 'cause we try to do what we know is right. When I was very young, I used to think He always gave people a reward for doing right; but now I know better than that."

"Suppose you tell me your trouble, dear; and see if I cannot help you to understand it."

"Yes, mamma," said Bessie, thoughtfully. "I think I might, for you know about the clock from Maggie, and so I shall not be breaking my promise."

And then she told her mother all about her trial and temptation in the affair of the broken clock.

Mrs Bradford heard her in silence, only now and then tenderly smoothing her hair, or softly patting the little hand which rested on her knee; but Maggie went into a state of fidgety indignation, which she could scarcely restrain till the story was finished, when she broke out with—

“I knew it! I knew it! I just knew it! That day that you were so mournful and mysterious, and wouldn’t tell even me what ailed you, I knew those hateful old young ladies had been plaguing you some way; and I just hope not one of them will have a single prize! And I’m very much disappointed in Miss Kate. I didn’t think she’d be so mean, even if she does tease.”

Disappointed! So was Bessie, more sorely than could be put into words; and in spite of Kate’s continued, even increased kindness to her since that day, she could not get back the old feeling of trust and confidence. And Kate saw it, and grieved over it; and so, perhaps, the lesson she had received sank deeper into her heart.

“Bessie,” said Mrs Bradford, “is there not one reward of which we are always sure, if we do our *Father’s* will?”

"Yes, mamma," said the little girl: "you mean, to know He is pleased with us. But it did seem as if He must be pleased, if I could be such a good child in school as to gain the prize that would be such a help to poor Jemmy; and it did seem as if it was very much His work, and I am very disappointed I could not do it."

"But sometimes, darling, we mean to serve God in one way, and He sees fit to have us do it in another; and sometimes we are doing His work and glorifying Him when we do not know it ourselves. Benito did not know he was carrying his pearls in his bosom, until he went into his Father's presence."

"No," said Bessie, smiling brightly at her mother's allusion to the old, well-loved story, and then looking grave again.

Mrs Bradford saw that she was not quite content, and said:—

"Bessie, can you not feel satisfied to know that you have done more to serve and honour your Father in heaven by refusing to do evil that good might come, and holding firmly to the truth, than you would have done if you had gained fifty prizes for Jemmy?"

"Yes, mamma," said Bessie, brightening again; "and do you think God gave me that to be my work instead of earning the hospital bed?"

"I am sure of it, dear; and sure also that His blessing has followed your effort to keep in the way of truth."

"And, mamma, do you know I was thinking—I have to do a good deal of thinking about this—that even if I had promised to tell a story to Mrs Ashton, and the young ladies had voted me the prize, it would not have been fair, 'cause it was for the best and most truthful child in the school; and they could not have given it to me for that, but 'cause I had done them a wicked favour."

"And you would have had no peace or contentment in gaining it so, darling, even if Jemmy had been cured by this means. And, Bessie, I am quite sure no one of your schoolmates cares less for you, because you did not suffer them to tempt you into wrong, however vexed they might have been at the time."

"I care less for *them*," said Maggie, putting her arms around Bessie's neck; "and I'm just *going* to let them see it. I shan't speak to those four girls, or smile at them, but look very offended

every time I see them. And I'm going to persuade all the rest of our class to be offended with them too."

"I do not want you to repeat this, Maggie," said Mrs Bradford, to whom the story was not new, although the children thought it was.

"Mustn't I, mamma?" said Maggie, rather crest-fallen. "Well, I suppose it would be telling tales; so I will just ask the other children to be offended with the big girls just to oblige me, and for a good reason that is a secret."

Mrs Bradford did not make any reply to this. She did not wonder that Maggie was shocked and indignant; but she knew that her resentment was never lasting, and that long before Monday morning, she would have thought better of this resolution. Nor was she wrong; for having dismissed the children to be dressed before their little friends came, she overheard Maggie say,—

"Bessie, I think after all I had better not coax our class to be offended with those larger girls: you see, maybe they have begun to repent of their meanness, and it might discourage them if they would like 'to turn over a new leaf.'"

"Yes," said Bessie, "I think so too; and I

meant to ask you not to, Maggie. Let's forgive and forget."

"I'll forgive, and I'll try to forget," said Maggie; "but I'm afraid that particular will be very hard work. But I will say that I hope perhaps one of them will have a prize after all, and I s'pose that will be a very good way of forgiving."

XII.

BESSIE'S PARTY.

"We are going to have a party," said Maggie.

"Who, your mamma?" said Nellie Ransom.

"Why, no," said Maggie: "we, Bessie and I. Next Tuesday is Bessie's birthday, when she will be seven years old; and mamma said we might have a party."

"Oh, how lovely!" said Dora Johnson: "and will you invite me, Maggie?"

"Well, yes, we will: 'cause mamma said we might have all the class," answered Maggie; "but, Dora, you ought not to *ask* us to invite you."

"Why not?" said Dora.

"Because it is not polite to ask people to invite you to their houses. We would *have* to, even if we did not want you, or else hurt your feelings by telling you we would rather not have *you*."

"You need not ask me if you don't want to," said Dora, pouting. "I don't care for going to your old party!"

"But we do want you, and you would like to come," said Bessie, good-naturedly; "for it is going to be very nice, and we are to have a magic-lantern."

"Oh, how perfectly lovely!" said Fanny Leroy, clapping her hands. "I never saw a magic-lantern: I'll be sure to come."

"Now, there's another of you," said Maggie, in rather an aggrieved tone. "You ought not to say you'll come, till you're invited. Bessie and I are going to send you an invitation all written in a note, and you must answer it in the same way, and not say you'll come *before-time*. I'm sorry I told you, if you act this way about it."

"When did you say it was to be?" asked Nellie.

"Next Tuesday," said Maggie: "the first of May. That's Bessie's birthday."

"And that is the day Miss Ashton's uncle is going to give the prizes," said Gracie Howard.

"Why, so it is!" said Lily Norris. "What a very 'markable day it will be for us!"

Here the bell rang, and the young voices were all hushed. But after school was opened, the children found that one of the expected "remarkable" events would not, after all, take place on the first day of May.

"Children," said Miss Ashton, "a letter came from my uncle this morning, saying that he had been called out of town on very important business, and so could not be here on Tuesday, to present the prizes. But on the following Thursday he hopes to be at home, and wishes to have all the compositions handed to him on the evening of that day, so that he may read them before Friday, when he will be here. We shall have no regular school on that day, but a little examination will take the place of the usual lessons; and you may tell such of your friends as would like to come, that we will be happy to see them."

So the giving of the prizes was to be made quite a little affair. Some of the children were pleased, and some were not; timid Maggie, and one or two more who were afflicted with that troublesome shyness, being among the latter number.

But going to school had really proved of service to Maggie in conquering her extreme bash-

fulness, as her friends had hoped; and though her colour might still come and go, and her voice shake somewhat if a stranger spoke to her, she could now hold up her head, and answer as became a well-bred and polite little lady. Nor did she longer let it stand in the way of offering to do a kind thing for other people if she had the opportunity; but when that came to her, tried to forget herself, and to think only of the help she might be. For having the will to cure herself, Maggie had succeeded in her efforts, and her improvement in this respect was much to her credit.

As for Bessie, she cared little, except for Maggie's sake, whether there were half a dozen or fifty people present, besides those she called her "own." She was neither a shy nor a bold child; nor was she vain. But when she had a thing to do, she did it with a straightforward simplicity, and a dignified, lady-like little manner, which were both amusing and attractive. If she knew the answer to a question, and that it was right for her to give it, she could do so almost as readily before a room full of people as before one or two; and this was because she did not think of herself, or what people were thinking of her, but

only if the thing were right, and of the proper way to do it.

Now I would by no means be understood to say that those little people who are not troubled with timidity themselves should blame or think hardly of those who suffer from it. It is a part of some natures, not of others; and those who are free from it should do all they can to help and encourage those who are not so. But certain it is, that we can do much ourselves towards conquering this troublesome little "fox;" and if my young readers could only know how much more happy as well as useful they may be when free from his vexatious attacks, I am sure they would do all they could to bury him out of sight and hearing.

For herself, Bessie had, as we know, no thought of a prize. From the older girls, influenced by Kate Maynard, she would not, she believed, receive a single vote. Kate had never withdrawn that threat; indeed, she had almost forgotten she had ever made it, and it never occurred to her that Bessie still expected her to act upon it. The little girls were divided, each one having her own favourite, whom she thought the most *deserving*, and for whom she intended to vote;

and Bessie imagined that the only hope of the hospital bed for lame Jemmy lay with Belle Powers. For Belle was now so much interested in all that concerned Maggie and Bessie that she was almost as anxious as they were to gain it for him; and she had been to Riverside with her young friends, and seen the lame boy, so that she took an interest in him on his own account also.

Lily Norris, too, had promised that if this prize came to her she would give it to Jemmy; but there was small chance of that. Lily was a roguish, mischievous little thing, and a great chatterbox; and it would not do to tell how often she had broken the rules by talking and laughing aloud at forbidden times, throwing paper-balls, making faces, and so forth. No, no, *Lily* would never have the prize for being the best child in the school.

But in spite of her half-jealousy of Gracie Howard, and her acknowledgment to her mother that she *might* possibly earn the composition prize, Bessie had little doubt in her own mind that it would fall to Maggie, and thought *it rather* unreasonable in any one to expect to *carry it* away from her. Her own Maggie, who

"made up" such delightful stories and plays, and who had written the "Complete Family," that wonderful book for which Uncle Ruthven had paid such a price, could scarcely fail to be the successful one here; and Bessie had little fear on that score. But she knew that Maggie's pleasure would be for the moment half destroyed if she were obliged to receive the prize in the presence of strangers; and she turned to her sister with a sympathising glance, which was met with a look of the utmost dismay from Maggie.

But there was one young heart there which was troubled with no such painful misgivings as poor Maggie's. A vain and ambitious little heart it was, and rather gloried in the opportunity of displaying its expected triumphs before a number of admiring eyes.

Gracie Howard was a very clever child, and none knew this better than herself. It had been often said in her hearing, not by her father and mother, for they were too wise to do such a thing; but by foolish people who imagined they would please her parents by saying so, and had no thought of the harm they might be doing the child. But Mr and Mrs Howard would have

been far better satisfied to have their little daughter only half as clever, and to see her modest, humble, and free from the vanity which was spoiling all the finer traits of her character. Not that Gracie was a bad child by any means ; on the contrary, she was in many respects a very sweet little girl. But, ah ! that ugly weed of self-conceit : how many fair plants and precious seeds it chokes up and keeps out of sight !

Mr and Mrs Howard had hoped that by sending her to school where she would be thrown with other children, this fault of Gracie's might be checked. But it had only grown upon her, as they saw with sorrow.

Miss Ashton had a bright set of little girls in her class, but Gracie was certainly the brightest and quickest among them ; and she very soon became aware of this. She had had more perfect lessons than any one of the others, that they all knew ; and Gracie herself had not the least doubt that she would also have the best composition, and so gain both these prizes. She was not at all disturbed by the fact that all the other children, with whom gentle and modest Maggie was much more of a favourite than Gracie, declared their belief and hope that the former would

be successful. She took it all good-naturedly, too well pleased with herself and her own performances to be vexed at anything they could say; and only answering, with a self-satisfied shake of the head, that they would "see who was the smartest when the day came."

She was really fond of Maggie Bradford, and felt sorry for the disappointment she thought was in store for her; and would have been glad if two composition prizes had been offered, so that her little companion might have one, provided that the *first* came to herself. Her father and mother would have been better pleased that she should have had none, and so learned that others could do as well and better than herself.

The class had a good deal to talk about that day, as soon as school was over. The arrangements for the prize-day and Bessie's party occasioned a good deal of chattering. They were all welcome to talk of the latter as much as they pleased, and to say how delightful it would be, and how much they expected to enjoy themselves; only on no account was any one to say she was coming before she received her written invitation, and answered it in form. Maggie was very particular on that point.

The invitations were all sent and accepted in the most ceremonious manner, and quite to Maggie's satisfaction, on the following day, which was Saturday.

Even Belle Powers, who came to spend the day with Maggie and Bessie, received her note the moment she entered the house, and was requested to answer it before they began to play, which she did on a sheet of Bessie's stamped paper. To be sure, a slight difficulty arose from the fact that the initials B. R. B. did not stand well for Belle Powers; but that was speedily remedied by Maggie, who, with her usual readiness for overcoming such obstacles, suggested that they might for once be supposed to stand for "Beloved, Reasonable Belle;" an idea which met with the highest approbation from the other children. Nor was it of the slightest consequence that Maggie was herself obliged to dictate the words in which the invitation was to be accepted. It was enough that it *was* accepted; and this important business being satisfactorily concluded, they all went happily to their play.

Tuesday afternoon came, bringing with it the merry, happy party to keep Bessie's birthday. Besides her young classmates, there were half a

dozen other little ones; the family from Riverside and from grandmamma's; Mr Hall and Mr Powers; and last and not least, but by no means the person of smallest importance, Mrs Rush's bright, three-months-old baby, May Bessie, the "subject" of Maggie's famous composition, and our Bessie's particular pet and darling.

Bessie had a fancy—no one could tell how it had arisen—that the baby's pretty second name had been given for her. Perhaps if it had been necessary to undeceive her, young Mrs Stanton might have laid claim to the honour; but, seeing the child's satisfaction in the idea, no one had the heart to do so. It gave her a special interest in the baby, and Mrs Bradford and Colonel Rush were rather glad that it should be so, for they had feared that Bessie might think the Colonel would care less for her, now that he had a little daughter of his own to pet and love.

But no shade of that slight feeling of jealousy with which Bessie had sometimes to do battle, seemed to have been called forth by this new claimant on the hearts of her friends. Her delight in it was pure and unselfish; and it was for her and Maggie a fresh source of pleasure whenever they visited Colonel and Mrs Rush.

And Maggie, partly to please Bessie, partly "for a compliment to Uncle Horace and Aunt May," had discarded all other subjects of composition, and taken this dear baby; telling how a little angel had wandered down from heaven to earth to see if it could be of any use there, and falling in with "a brave, lame soldier," and his wife, concluded that it could not do better than stay and make them happy; "because they deserved to have a little bit of heaven in their home," wrote Maggie.

"A little bit of heaven" the baby had certainly brought with it, as the darlings usually do; and had Aunt May needed any further reward than she had already received for the loving teachings she had bestowed on her young Sunday scholars, she would have found it in the joy which they took in her joy, and in this pretty, simple story of Maggie's, which she laughed over and cried over, and then privately copied, putting the copy carefully away with some other small treasures which were very dear.

The birthday party could not be expected to go off well, unless that very considerate "little angel" took part in it; and so Aunt May had been coaxed to let her come for a short time.

And certainly no young lady ever received a greater share of attention at her first party, than did this little queen, who took it all in the most dignified manner, and as if it were a thing to which she was quite accustomed.

May Bessie had just been carried away by her nurse, when Gracie Howard came in, carrying in one hand a lovely bouquet, in the other a roll of paper neatly tied with a scarlet ribbon. The former she presented to Bessie; and the other children, supposing the latter to be some pretty picture, expected to see that placed in the same hands.

But that did not follow; and presently, when Maggie asked, "What would you all like to play first?" Gracie untied the ribbon, and said—

"I've brought my prize composition, and I'll read it aloud. Don't you want to hear it?"

"No," said Dora Johnson and Mamie Stone: "we don't."

"Oh, but you *must*!" said Gracie, unrolling her paper and jumping upon a chair.

"Proudly! Proudly!" said Fanny Leroy; "you are always wanting to show off your own compositions."

"*Before I'd think so much of myself,*" cried

another. But Gracie, nothing daunted, turned to Bessie, and said—

“You want to hear it: don’t you, Bessie? and it’s your party.”

“No,” said Bessie, her politeness struggling with her truthfulness and resentment at Gracie’s vanity. “I don’t *want* to hear it; but I’ll let you read it, if you are so very anxious.”

This was permission enough for Gracie; and she read aloud the composition with an air and tone which seemed to say, “There! do better than that if you can!”

Maggie and Bessie listened, feeling bound to do so, as Gracie was a visitor; and, moreover, they both had a strong desire to judge for themselves if her composition was likely to prove the best. Two or three of the other little girls remained also from curiosity; but the most of them walked away in great disgust at Gracie’s love of “showing off.”

Several of the grown people were at the other end of the room, and Gracie raised her voice, that they might also have the benefit of her performance; but to her great mortification, not one of them seemed to pay the slightest attention. The truth was they all heard well enough,

but none of them chose to gratify the conceited little puss by letting her suppose they were listening.

Maggie's countenance fell as Gracie went on, but Bessie's brightened; and, at the close, she drew a long breath of satisfaction.

"There!" said Gracie, triumphantly; "shan't I have the prize for that?"

"No," said Bessie, "I don't believe you will. It is very nice, Gracie, but my Maggie's is a great deal better—oh, yes! a *great deal* better! It is beautiful! I'm sorry for you if you're disappointed; but I know hers is the best, and I'm very glad for Maggie."

"You'd better not be so sure I'll be disappointed," said Gracie.

Bessie did not answer; but the very satisfied look with which she turned to her sister provoked Gracie.

"You think Maggie is so great!"

"Yes, I *do*," answered Bessie, defiantly.

"And I'd rather think my sister great than think myself great," said Nellie Ransom.

Here Mrs Bradford, hearing that the young voices were not very good-natured in their tones, came to prevent a quarrel; and Annie Stanton

following, proposed a game of hide-and-seek. It was readily agreed to, and peace was restored.

The game went on for some time with great success, and at last it came to Bessie's turn to be hidden. Sending the seekers to their gathering-place in the dining-room, Aunt Annie took her to the library, and hid her snugly away in a corner behind a tall pedestal, drawing the window-curtain about it so as to conceal her still further.

As Bessie lay there, listening to the voices of the other children as they wandered, now nearer, now farther off, in their search for her, her Uncle Ruthven and Colonel Rush came into the library, and placed themselves by the window near which she lay hidden.

"I'm here in the corner, Uncle Ruthven; but please don't take any notice, for fear the other children know," she whispered, but so softly that neither of the gentlemen heard her, and went on talking without knowing who was near them.

"That little Howard is an uncommonly clever child," said Mr Stanton, presently. "*That* composition is quite beyond her years."

"H'm," said the Colonel, "conceited little monkey!"

"Yes," said Mr Stanton, "it is painful to see an otherwise pleasant child so pert and forward."

"It is a great pity," said the Colonel, "a great pity. I hope her self-conceit may not be encouraged by receiving the prize."

"I have no doubt that it will fall to her," said Uncle Ruthven. "You must acknowledge that, pretty as our Maggie's composition is, this of Gracie's goes before it in all those particulars which would be likely to take a prize."

"Yes," answered Colonel Rush, reluctantly, "I suppose it does. I do not know that I should be an unprejudiced judge in this matter, owing to my special interest in Maggie's subject," he added, laughing; "and the simplicity and poetry of her little story have gone very close to my heart. But, apart from this, I do not think it will be well for Gracie to gain the prize; though I fear with you that she will be the successful candidate."

Bessie did not know what "candidate" meant; but she understood very well that her uncle and the Colonel thought that Gracie would gain the prize; and who could be better judges than they?

She sat motionless with grief and amazement, forgetting her game, forgetting everything but Maggie's disappointment and her own. She did not hear anything more that was said by the two gentlemen: she did not notice when Uncle Ruthven opened the window, and they both stepped out upon the piazza; and when, a moment later, Lily Norris drew aside the curtain, and joyfully exclaimed, "Here she is!" Bessie felt almost angry that she was forced to come forth from her hiding-place.

She was not cross, however; she did not even let the tears find way; but her pleasure in her birthday party was quite gone. Not even that wonderful magic-lantern, which was displayed as soon as it was dark, to the great delight of the other children, could give her any satisfaction; and it was impossible to look at the troubled little face without seeing that something had happened greatly to disturb her.

But she could not be persuaded to say what ailed her, till all the young guests had gone, and mamma had taken her up-stairs, when she repeated, as nearly as she could, what her uncle and Colonel Rush had said.

Maggie, too, was dismayed at this sudden

downfall of her hopes; for she agreed with Bessie that Uncle Ruthven and the Colonel must know; and their mother, who had also heard Gracie's composition, could not encourage them by giving a contrary opinion.

"I must really say, dear Maggie," she said, "that I would rather have yours than Gracie's; but I think that hers is almost sure to be the successful one."

"And all Maggie's pains are lost," said Bessie, mournfully.

"Not at all, dear. Maggie has done all she could be asked to do, her very best; and it is no fault of hers if another has in some respects done better. And her pains are by no means thrown away, if it were only for the pleasure her story has given to our dear Colonel and Mrs. Rush."

"Then, I'm glad I took them," said Maggie; "but, oh, mamma!" and she ended with a long sigh.

"So am I," said Bessie; "and I know the Colonel thinks your composition is *splendid*, Maggie; and he would rather you should have the prize."

"I was afraid when I heard Gracie read

hers," said Maggie. "It sounded so much more grown-up-y than mine. Mamma, did it make you feel sorry too?"

"No, darling. I will tell you what I felt: that I would rather have my own Maggie as she is, even without the slightest hope of a prize, than to see her vain and forward, and winning the richest of earthly rewards."

XIII.

LOST AND FOUND.

THE children were just ready to start for school the next morning, and papa had promised to walk as far as Mrs Ashton's door with them, when there was a violent ringing at the bell ; and when the front door was opened, in rushed Gracie Howard, flushed and excited, and with her face wearing the marks of a hard fit of crying.

Her father followed her.

" Oh ! " exclaimed Gracie, without waiting to say " good-morning " herself, or allowing any one else to do so, " have you seen it ? have you seen it ? "

" Seen what ? " asked Maggie and Bessie in a breath.

" There ! " said Gracie, bursting into tears again, " I knew it ! oh ! I just knew it ! I told you I was sure I brought it away with me, papa."

"What is the matter?" asked Mr Bradford, shaking hands with Mr Howard.

"She has lost her composition," answered Mr Howard. "It seems she brought it here yesterday afternoon, with the purpose, I am sorry to say, of making a display of it to her young companions; and this morning it was missing. She is quite positive she had it in her hands when she left your house, but does not recollect bringing it as far as our own; and her mother, who took off her cloak as soon as she came home, says she is quite sure Gracie carried no composition. But although the child is so confident, I thought she might be mistaken, and find she had left it here. Good-morning, madam:" this to Mrs Bradford, who had been called into the hall by Gracie's cries; and the difficulty was next explained to her.

"I believe Gracie is right," said the lady. "She left the paper lying on the library table, and seeing it there just as she was going away, I brought it out and gave it to her. I do not think she can have left it here; but I will inquire if the servants have seen it."

The servants were questioned, but all declared they had seen nothing of the missing paper; and

it seemed that Gracie must have lost it in the street. She moaned and sobbed and cried as if she had lost all the world held dear for her, and would not listen to a word of comfort. She thrust the children from her when they would have offered her their sympathy, saying she knew they were "glad, because now Maggie could have the prize;" nor would she listen to her father's entreaties and commands that she should be silent, although at last he spoke very severely to her, and was obliged to take her home, in spite of its being nearly school-time. She was in no state for school just then.

Maggie walked slowly by her father's side on the way to Mrs Ashton's, not skipping and jumping as usual; and when they reached the door, she seized hold of him, and said—

"Papa, I'm afraid I feel glad about Gracie's composition. Do you think I am dreadfully awful?"

"No," said papa, smiling: "I do not. But if I were you, Maggie, I would not say 'awful' so much. That is something you have learned at school, which I should be glad to have you unlearn as soon as possible. But as to the composition—well, I suppose you could scarcely be

expected to feel otherwise ;” and Mr Bradford smiled again as he thought that if he were questioned he might be obliged to confess to a share in Maggie’s feelings. “I believe it is only natural, dear ; but I hope you will not let Gracie see it.”

“Oh, no, papa !” said Maggie ; “I hope I wouldn’t be so mean as that. I do feel sorry for Gracie, even if I am glad for myself to have a better chance.”

“And we’ll try to be kinder to Gracie too, so she’ll have no reason to think we’re not sorry for her,” said Bessie.

All this had made our little girls rather later than usual ; and they had to take their places immediately, so that there was no opportunity to tell the news until school had been opened, when Miss Ashton, seeing Gracie was not present, turned to Maggie and said—

“Gracie is absent. Did you make her ill at your party last night, Maggie ?”

Then Maggie told of Gracie’s loss ; and two or three of the children said they remembered quite well that Mrs Bradford had come into the hall, and handed Gracie her paper just before she went away.

The child came in a little later, looking the very picture of woe, and bringing an excuse for tardiness from her mother. But she was in no mood to meet any extra kindness in a grateful spirit; and showed herself altogether so pettish and disagreeable that Miss Ashton was more than once obliged to call her to order. Then she cried afresh, and said that every one was "hateful," and no one cared for her, and that she just believed they would not tell her if they knew where her composition was.

"Come here, Gracie," said Miss Ashton; and Gracie went slowly and reluctantly to her teacher's side. "Do you really think if any of your schoolmates knew where your composition was, they would not tell you?" said the lady.

Gracie put up her shoulder, hung her head, and fidgeted from one foot to another; but Miss Ashton repeated her question.

Then, her ill-temper getting the upper hand of all her better feelings, she answered sulkily—

"I don't believe Maggie or Bessie would. I know they are just glad enough."

"O-o-o-h! o-o-o-h! What a shame!" and such exclamations broke from the other children. But Miss Ashton commanded silence.

"That is a grave charge to bring against any one, Gracie, and especially against those who have been your friends for so long," said the lady. "I am ashamed of you."

And Gracie was ashamed of herself, though she would not acknowledge it; but only pouted the more at Miss Ashton's gentle reproof.

"Now, my dear," said the lady, "I cannot have you behaving in this way. You are interfering with the peace and comfort of the whole class; and unless you can make up your mind to be reasonable, you must go and sit by yourself in the cloak-room."

Foolish Gracie! she chose the latter, and went away by herself to nurse her ill-humour and disappointed vanity.

There was no time now to write another composition. The rough sketch of the first she had thrown into the fire, thinking she would never need it again; and Gracie did not find her trouble easier to bear because it was, as her father had told her, the result of her own love of display.

Maggie and Bessie were both hurt and indignant at her injustice; but they knew she would be sorry for it when she was in a more reason-

able humour, and would not agree to Belle's proposal that "the whole class should be angry with her as long as they lived."

Although Mrs Bradford felt almost sure that Gracie had taken the missing paper away with her, and lost it on the way home, she had a thorough search made for it, but all in vain.

Harry and Fred, the latter especially, were openly jubilant over the loss, imagining, as every one else did, that this left a clear field for Maggie; and declared that "it served Miss Vanity right, and they were not a bit sorry for her."

That evening Mr and Mrs Bradford went out to dinner, leaving the children quietly amusing themselves in the library. Harry was reading aloud to his little sisters; while Fred was busy with some wax flowers, at which pretty work he was quite expert.

Flossy, not quite approving of such quiet doings, sat on the corner of Maggie's chair: but had any one of the four been at leisure to notice him, they would have seen that he was watching his chance for any bit of mischief which might lead to a frolic.

Fred had spread a paper upon the table, so

that the blue cloth with which it was covered might not become soiled with the wax and other materials with which he was busy. He was generally ready enough to indulge Flossy with a game of play; and the dog, finding that he could attract attention in no other way, suddenly jumped up, and seized the corner of the paper, dragging it half off the table, and upsetting a little saucer of pink powder with which Fred was colouring the rose he was making.

Fred was provoked, and sent him off with a cuff upon his ear, instead of the romp he had been looking for; then set about repairing the damage he had caused as speedily as possible, his brother and sisters coming to his help.

Some of the pink powder had gone upon the table, and though Harry took it up carefully with a paper-knife, it left its traces behind.

"Oh! won't Patrick be in a taking when he sees the table?" said Fred.

"It will come off, I think," said Harry. "Let's brush it up, so as not to vex his old soul. Bessie, run and bring the whisk brush out of the drawer in the hall-table: that's a pet."

Away ran Bessie into the hall, and going to *the* table, pulled open the drawer. As she did

so, she heard something slip, with a little rustle like that of paper; but she did not pay much attention to it till she tried to shut the drawer, and found that there was something in the way which prevented it from closing tight.

Many children would have run away without waiting to see what was wrong, but that did not suit at all with Bessie's neat, orderly ways. Once more she pulled out the drawer, which moved stiffly as if it caught upon something, and peeped within. At first, she could not see anything; and she drew it farther out. Again there came that rustle of paper; and, as she peered in, there, over the back of the drawer, half in, half out, was something white with—Bessie could not see very distinctly, and she would not venture another glance—with something that looked as if it might be an end of scarlet ribbon hanging from it. She started, shut up the drawer hastily, thrusting it as far in as she could, and ran back to the library with her heart beating fast.

"Hallo!" said Fred, as he put out his hand to take the brush from her, "what has frightened you? You look as if you'd seen something."

"You have no right to say I saw anything,"

said Bessie, in a tone so sharp and angry that her brothers and sister looked at her in great surprise.

"Whew!" said Fred. "You seem to have picked up a fit of crossness any way. I'd like to know what has come over you so suddenly."

"You can just hush and let me alone," said Bessie. "I'll never bring you a brush again, Fred;" and then she ran out of the room, and up-stairs as fast as she could go.

"Well, did you ever?" exclaimed Fred.

"What can ail her?" said Harry. "She surely did not mind going for the brush?"

"Why, no," answered Fred: "she seemed ready enough; but she came back the next moment in such a fume, and looking scared out of her wits."

"I'm going to see," said Maggie: "she'll tell me;" and she ran after Bessie.

But Maggie was mistaken.

She found Bessie in their mother's room, her angry mood passing away; but she still looked flushed and troubled, and to all Maggie's anxious questioning, she would give no satisfactory answer.

"You must have seen something that frightened you: didn't you, Bessie?"

"I don't know," answered Bessie: "I was frightened; but I don't *know* if I saw what I saw,—I mean I don't know if I saw what I *thought* I saw, and I didn't want to look again."

"Was it a robber?" asked Maggie.

"No," said Bessie. "If it had been a robber, I'd have said, 'Thou shalt not steal,' and then run for Patrick to take him to the policeman."

"I fancy he wouldn't have waited till Patrick came," said Maggie. "But tell me about it, Bessie."

"Not now, Maggie. Maybe I'll have to tell you some other time; but you wouldn't like to hear it, and I'll have to think about it first. Oh! I do *wish* mamma was home!"

"Is it a weight on your mind?" asked Maggie, who, as well as her sister, was very fond of this expression.

Bessie nodded assent with a long and solemn shake of her head.

"I think you might tell *me*," said Maggie.

"I don't mean to keep it secret from you for ever and ever," said Bessie; "but you see I'm not quite sure about something, and I'm 'fraid I ought to make myself sure. And if I was sure, I would not know what I ought to do."

It is very hard to think what is right about it."

Maggie looked wonderingly into her sister's puzzled face. What could have happened to trouble her so in that moment or two she was out in the hall? But anxious though she was, she asked no more questions, knowing that Bessie would tell her this wonderful secret when she was ready.

"There's the bell for our supper," she said. "Come down, and don't bother yourself any more about it."

Bessie obeyed the first injunction, but the second was out of her power. She was no longer cross, however, and begged Fred's pardon for having spoken so pettishly to him; but she sent away her supper almost untasted, and continued thoughtful and rather mournful till her bed-time. She was really glad when that hour came, and she was safe in bed, when she could think over this troublesome matter in quiet, and ask for the help which never failed her.

She thought she should stay awake till her mother came home, and as she lay tossing and *restless*, it seemed to her that mamma was *staying away half the night*. But although it was

not really so very late, she had dropped off to sleep before her mother came to see if her little girls were all safe and quiet for the night; and mamma was sorry to find Bessie's face and pillow wet with tears.

Nurse could not tell what the trouble had been, only that Bessie had seemed dull and out of spirits when she put her to bed, and would not say what ailed her.

The little girl woke very early the next morning, and finding Maggie still sleeping, she lay quietly thinking.

Thinking of that which had troubled and puzzled her so last night; but now it seemed all clear.

She *feared* that the paper which she had seen in the drawer was Gracie's composition; but she was not *sure*; and she had had a hard struggle with herself, trying to believe that it was not her duty to go and find out.

A voice had whispered to her, "What is the good of looking? You only saw a paper which *may* be Gracie's, and may not be; and it is none of your business. Just let it alone, and trouble yourself no more about it. If you found it was really the lost composition, what would you do

then? Go and tell every one, and take away Maggie's chance for the prize? Remember what your uncle and the Colonel said. And does not every one say that Gracie is only properly punished for her vanity? Why should you interfere? If you did know that was the missing paper, is there any reason why you should tell where it is? If you injure Gracie by keeping it back, do you not injure Maggie by bringing it to light? Maggie is your sister, your own dear little sister; and surely you ought to consider her first, and do what is best for her."

"But," said Conscience, "is it right, is it just? How would you feel towards any one who did this to Maggie? Would you not say they had acted unfairly and meanly towards her? Would you like your papa or mamma or any other person to know it? Will Jesus be pleased with you, and think you are acting as His own little child should do?"

Poor little thing! She was really sorely puzzled. She could not make it seem right to do what she wished to do, and what seemed to be best for her sister; and yet how could she make up her mind to do what appeared so unkind to her own Maggie? Oh, if mamma were only

there to help her to know what was right and best! Well, all she could do was to tell her all her doubts in the morning.

Such were the thoughts which had disturbed her last night, and called forth the tears with which mamma had found her pillow wet; but this morning the struggle was over, and Bessie felt quite sure that there was only *one* right thing for her to do.

She lay still till Maggie woke, and then said, "Maggie, are you wide awake? 'cause I have a bad news to tell you."

Maggie, who was always very wide awake, and ready for the day's business the moment her eyes were opened, answered, eager with expectation, "Oh, yes! very wide indeed. Is it about what troubled you last night, Bessie? Tell me quick."

"Yes," said Bessie, slowly; "but first I want to ask you something, dear Maggie. If I had to do a very unkind thing to you, or to some other person, what would you think I ought to do?"

"Why," said Maggie, sitting up in her little bed, "I would think you ought to choose that *other person* to do it to. I'm your sister, you

know," in a tone as if this quite settled the question.

"Yes," said poor Bessie, with a sigh. "But then, Maggie, what if I thought it most right to do it to you?"

"Well," said Maggie, hugging up her knees, and leaning her chin against them, while she gazed in surprise at Bessie—"well, if you thought such a queer thing as that, why, I'd have to think you were a little bit crazy, Bessie."

"Yes, if I *wanted* to do it, Maggie; but you know I would rather do an unkind thing to any one than you. But if it seemed the *truest*, the *honestest* way, would you think I was crazy then?"

"Well, no," said Maggie, rather doubtfully; "but I don't see how that could be, Bessie; and I can't judge much if you don't tell me more about it."

"Maggie, last night, when I went to the drawer in the hall-table, I saw something there, 'way far back, that looked like a rolled-up paper."

"Well?" said Maggie.

"And I *think*, but I am not *sure*, that it had a piece of red ribbon on it; but I did not wait

to look again, and shut up the drawer very quick."

"Oh!" said Maggie, as she released her clasp on her knees, and rolled over on her pillow; "then that was what ailed you last night, I suppose."

"Yes," answered Bessie, piteously; "and you know what I thought it looked like; don't you, Maggie?"

"Well, yes," said Maggie, taking the news much more coolly than Bessie had supposed she would. "I suppose you thought it was Gracie's composition; and it was."

"How do you know?" asked Bessie, starting up.

"'Cause last night I went to put the brush back in the drawer, and when I pulled it open, I heard something rustle, and I peeped in, and poked it till it fell out on the floor; and it was Gracie's paper, all messed up and crumpled. I fancy it came so, being squeezed up in the drawer. So you see she didn't take it away with her after all; but I do wonder how it came there."

"But why didn't you tell me?" asked Bessie.

"Why, I thought you had one unhappiness

in your mind already," said Maggie; "and I knew you would feel rather sorry about this, so I thought I would not tell you till this morning. But, Bessie, why didn't you tell *me*, and why didn't you look again and be sure?"

"'Cause I didn't want to be sure. O Maggie! you were a great deal better than me. I tried to think I did not know what the paper was, and that I need not find out if I did not want to, and that it was not mine to do anything about, and that it would not be right to do such an unkind thing to you. But all I could do, it would seem as if it was a kind of a cheat, not very true; and I had to feel as if I ought to look again, and if it was really Gracie's paper to give it to her. But I could not help praying a good deal that 'our Father' would not let it be the composition if He did not think it was very much the best. I think it was worse than about the hospital bed, Maggie. I did feel so sure yesterday that you would have the prize now."

"You darling, precious ducky!" said Maggie. "That was an awful temptation for you. Oh! I forgot. Papa told me not to say 'awful.' But then that was *really* awful; so I can say it this time."

"Didn't you feel a bit like hiding it, Maggie?" said Bessie.

"Why, no," said Maggie. "I never thought about its being the composition, till I picked it up, and saw it *was*. But I felt as provoked as anything for a moment,—I'm sure I don't know who at,—but I just felt that if it would not be so awfully—I mean so dreadfully—mean, I'd just like to tear the composition up. But after that, I was more sensible, and then I remembered about you, and how you'd be provoked too; so I put the paper back in the drawer, and thought I'd tell you and mamma this morning, and then we'd take it to school for Gracie."

"I believe you're just the best, darlinest girl that ever lived!" exclaimed Bessie, looking at her sister in great admiration and relief. "And now, dear Maggie, I suppose you know what the unkind thing was I had to do to you; and you won't think me a bit crazy, will you?"

"Why, no," said Maggie; you couldn't help it, you *had* to do it, so that I don't see that it was unkind. And, Bessie, you see it was a great deal harder for you about the temptation than it was for me. If it had been you that had a chance for the prize, I don't know if I could

have stood it: no, I don't, Bessie. There! mamma is awake. I hear her talking. Mamma! mamma! can we come in your bed? We have a discovery to tell you."

Mamma said "Yes," and, jumping up, they ran into the other room, and scrambled into her bed, where the "discovery," and the story of Bessie's temptation and struggle, were soon told.

"My dear little girls!" said Mrs Bradford, fondly. "I am so thankful."

"For what, mamma?" said Maggie, in surprise. "You are not glad that Gracie's composition is found, are you? I thought it was rather a misfortune; but then, you see, we could not help it."

"I am not *sorry*," said her mother, "since it has shown me that my fears were without cause, and that all your anxiety for these prizes could not make you unfair or ungenerous towards another, or lead either of you from the ways of truth and uprightness. Yes; I would rather know this than that my Maggie and Bessie should gain a thousand prizes."

It never was found out exactly how the lost paper came to be in that drawer. No one could

ect putting it there; and Mrs Bradford Gracie must have laid it on the table after brought it out to her, and some person must caught it up with other things, and thrust without noticing it. That drawer had been used with other places, but the paper had pushed out of sight, till Bessie heard the , and discovered it.

XIV.

THE AWARD.

GRACIE was not at school that morning, for the child had actually cried herself ill on the previous day ; but when Maggie gave her own composition to Miss Ashton to be placed in her uncle's hands, she gave Gracie's with it, as she knew her little friend would wish.

"And where was it found, dear?" asked Miss Ashton, who stood leaning against the window of the back room with her arm about Belle Powers' waist ; while most of the girls, large and small, were gathered about her, enjoying the sweet spring air which came in through the open window.

How pleasant the old garden looked this bright May morning, with the early leaves just budding forth, its peach trees covered with delicate pink blossoms, its crocuses, violets, and tulips all in full bloom, the pigeons dressing their

feathers on the stone wall, the guinea-hens and two peacocks strutting about, and the sparrows and other small birds twittering and hopping among the branches!

Maggie told where and how she had found the paper.

"And were you not put out when you found it?" said Kate Maynard, thoughtlessly.

Maggie looked up into the laughing face, and answered candidly, "Yes, Miss Kate, I was; but I think I'm over that now."

"Maggie was very good indeed about it, Miss Kate," said Bessie, quickly. "Nobody could be better. Mamma was very much pleased with her."

"Maggie is just a great deal *too* good," said Dora Johnson. "She ought to have left it in the drawer, and not said a word about it. *I* would have, and good enough for that proudy."

"Dora," said Miss Ashton, "I do not think you would have done a thing like that: would you, my dear?"

"Well, ma'am," said Dora, "if it had been for myself, maybe I wouldn't; but if I had known Gracie's composition was there, I wouldn't have told her, to give her a chance against Maggie."

"I wouldn't either," said Belle. "Let me throw it away again, and not tell Gracie;" she was quick and impulsive as she always was, and she snatched the unlucky paper from Miss Ashton's hand, and tossed it with all her little strength out of the window.

What would Gracie have said to see her mother's thought-of composition so scornfully handled? But it did not come to much further than that. Falling upon the roof of the piazza below, it rolled down to the edge and lay there.

"No, no, little Belle," said Miss Ashton, speaking in the gentle, excusing tone, which all teachers and scholars, used to the mother of a child of an over-indulgent, rather spoiling father. "No, no, little Belle: that is naughty. You would not be unfair to Gracie even for your favourite Maggie, would you?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Belle, decidedly. "I won't say Maggie is the best.

"But it is who has the best composition, who is the best child," said Miss Ashton. "And we are not the judges of that: all must have the same chance."

"I wish I were the judges," said Belle, regardless of grammar; "and I would give prizes

everything, and all to Maggie and Bessie; but only one for Miss Ashton," and she patted affectionately the hand about her waist. "Anyhow, Gracie can't get that *now*. When it rains, it will be all spoiled."

The girls laughed at the satisfied tone and nod of the head which accompanied these words; but Miss Ashton said, "Oh, no, Belle! I shall send Marcia out to pick it up. We must all be just to one another: must we not, Bessie?" and she smiled into the earnest eyes which were looking up into hers, though she had no idea of the struggle which her truthful little scholar had gone through before she could make up her mind that justice to Gracie was not something very like *injustice* to her own 'dear Maggie.

"Well," said Kate, laughing and rubbing Maggie's cheeks between her hands till they were even rosier than was natural to them, "if the composition prize *were* to go by favour, we all know who would have it: do we not, Maggie?"

Yes, this was so; and Gracie, really a pleasant, affectionate child, had arrayed all her school-mates against her by her self-conceit and vanity, till not one of them was ready to be pleased at the possibility of her gaining the prize.

She lay upon the sofa that afternoon, recovering from the headache into which she had cried herself. She still looked as if she felt very wretchedly both in mind and body, and lay idly playing with the tassels of the sofa-cushions, thinking, thinking of her lost treasure. Her father sat by the table, writing; her mother by the window, playing with her little brother.

"Why!" said Mrs Howard, looking out of the window to see what had called forth such a delighted exclamation from Charlie; "here are Maggie and Bessie with their nurse. Coming to see why you have not been to school, I suppose, Gracie."

"I don't want to see them, and I *won't*, now!" said Gracie, pettishly, flouncing herself around. "I know they've come to let me see how glad they are about to-morrow."

"Gracie!" said her father, sternly; "I will have no more of this." Then more gently, he added, "I do not know you, my daughter, in such a mood as this. You are not only destroying your own comfort and that of every one about you, but you are allowing your disappointed vanity to make you unjust and unkind to your little friends. I wish you to see Maggie and

Bessie, and to receive them as kindly and politely as you would have done a few days since, before this wicked jealousy took possession of you."

Gracie was startled, for she was not accustomed to hear her father speak in this way; indeed, she did not often deserve it, and she was still crying when Maggie and Bessie came in.

"Poor Gracie!" said Bessie, as soon as she and her sister had spoken to Mr and Mrs Howard; "we were 'fraid you were ill when you didn't come to school, so we asked mamma to let us come and see you, for we have some very good news for you."


"What?" said Gracie, looking and speaking as if no news would ever be good again to her.

"Your composition is found," said Maggie.

"Where is it?" asked Gracie, starting to her feet.

"I suppose Mr Ashton has it now," answered Maggie. "I gave it to Miss Ashton when I found you were not at school, 'cause they all had to be handed to her uncle this afternoon; and I thought that was what you would want me to do."

Gracie did not need to meet her father's or mother's accusing eye to feel how causeless her



unjust suspicions had been. Delight at the recovery of the lost paper was almost overcome by self-reproach and shame; and her head sank, while a choking feeling in her throat kept her from speaking her thoughts.

"Where was it found, dear child?" asked Mr Howard; and Maggie once more repeated the story.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, so sorry!" said Gracie, throwing an arm about the neck of each one of her little schoolmates.

"So sorry for what? 'cause your composition is found?" asked the wondering Bessie.

"No; because I was so naughty and ugly and hateful, and said such mean things to you and about you," said Gracie, more repentant than she could find words to tell.

"Oh! never mind now," said Maggie, with sweet forgiveness. "You wouldn't have said them if you hadn't been so disappointed."

"And, Gracie," said Bessie, "*we* couldn't help feeling a little glad, though we were sorry for you. I heard papa tell mamma it was only human nature, and I s'pose it's to be 'spected you'd have a little human nature too."

"What is human nature, Bessie?" asked Mr Howard.

Bessie stood thoughtful a moment, and then answered—

“I’m not very sure, sir ; but I think it means temper and selfishness and other naughty things that Jesus don’t like.”

Mr Howard smiled.

“Isn’t that right, sir ?” asked Bessie, rather anxiously

“Quite right, dear child,” answered the gentleman. “Human nature is pretty much made up of such things.”

“But then Jesus will help us with it, if we go to Him,” said the child, softly, to herself, thinking of the battle she had fought with her own sinful nature, and the victory she had won through the aid of the Captain she had chosen.

The good news about her composition did much toward helping on Gracie’s recovery ; and before Maggie and Bessie went away, she was quite herself once more, and talking cheerily to them about to-morrow’s expected events.

Mrs Ashton’s school-rooms were a pretty sight the next morning, for scarcely a girl in either class but had brought some flowers as a gift to her teacher, and they were all set forth to deck the rooms. The girls were all in white, the elder

ones with pink ribbons, the little children with blue, to mark their classes ; though there was not much need of this, for the difference in size would have done that readily enough. But it was a fancy of some of the girls, and as it put them all in a sort of uniform, and made the rooms look gay, it was just as well. But the bright young faces, full of pleasure and good-humour, were the greatest attraction there, and so thought Miss Ashton as one after another appeared.

The girls all came about two o'clock, though their friends were not expected till half an hour later.

"Did you ever see a lovelier day?" said Kate Maynard, coming in with her hands full of lilies of the valley, the sight of which called forth many an admiring "oh!" and "ah!" from the rest.

"Lovely!" said Julia Grafton: "it is a real genuine poet May-day. No make-believe spring about this."

"Oh!" said Kate, "we ought to have chosen a May queen, and crowned her. Why did we not think of it before? Well, it is not too late now: let us do it, and I will make a crown of these lilies."

The proposal met with general approval.

"Whom shall we choose?" said Fanny Leroy.

"One of the little ones, of course," said Kate, looking round upon the pleased group of the smaller children who gathered about her to watch the skilful fingers which were already at work upon the wreath of lilies.

Belle clapped her hands.

"Maggie, Maggie! let's have Maggie!" she said. "She's the best deserving for being so good about Gracie's composition."

"Yes, Maggie," said Gracie, who, feeling sure that she would herself carry off what she considered the greatest honour of the day, was glad to have her little friend obtain a lower one. "Let her be May queen."

The other children readily agreed, for Maggie's sweet-tempered and obliging ways had made her a favourite with all the school. She was not a little pleased; but when Kate had completed the wreath, her bashfulness took alarm at the idea of wearing it before all the ladies and gentlemen, and so exciting notice she might otherwise escape. It required a good deal of coaxing from all, and some pretence of hurt feeling on Kate's part, before she could be in-

duced to put it on ; but after a time she forgot the honours that had been forced upon her in the other claims upon her attention.

Only once was she a little disturbed after they were all in their places, and their friends had arrived. This was when Bessie, seeing her mother's eyes fixed with some surprise upon Maggie, thought herself called upon for an explanation. Placing a hand upon either side of her mouth, and speaking between them, she said, in a loud whisper which reached the ears of every one in both rooms, as well as the one for whom it was intended—

“She's May queen, mamma. The girls made her it. Don't she look lovely?”

A smile passed around the room, and down went her majesty's head in a style very unfitting one which wore a crown.

But now all were ready, and the examination began. There is no need to say much about that, save that it was not long, and, as Mr Ashton said, did credit to both teachers and scholars. Next, Mr Ashton made a speech, which the children liked all the better because it, too, was short; and then came the grand business of the day, the distribution of the prizes.

In the first class, that for composition was bestowed upon Kate Maynard; that for perfect lessons, upon Julia Grafton.

"Now for our little friends here," said Mr Ashton, turning to the younger children. "The greatest number of perfect lessons has been recited by Miss Gracie Howard. She stands four ahead of any other in her class; therefore she is justly entitled to the prize;" and he held towards Gracie a box containing a prettily bound set of those little library volumes so dear to the eyes and hearts of children.

She rose and came forward to receive it with a self-satisfied air, which said as plainly as could be without words, "Only look at me. Am I not a wonderful child? Do you not envy my father and mother?"

But in spite of their gratification at her success, her father and mother did not feel that they were to be envied just then. It was all spoiled by the little toss of the head, the look which swept the room seeking for admiration, and the conceited air which were the outward signs of Gracie's intense vanity; and her mother thought she would far rather see her as shy and shrinking as Maggie Bradford.

Gracie courtesied when Mr Ashton placed the books in her hand ; and then stood still as if waiting—for what ? So confident did she feel that the gentleman would, the next moment, call her name again, and bestow upon her the yet more coveted composition prize, that beautiful little rosewood writing-desk, that it did not seem worth while to go back to her seat ; and she actually remained waiting for it, till recalled to herself by Miss Ashton's "Gracie !" and the motion of her teacher's hand directing her to take her place.

"With regard to the compositions written by this younger class," continued Mr Ashton, "I must say that they are all very well done, remarkably so for such little girls, and show great pains taken both by the teacher and the taught. Three of them are so nearly equal in merit, that I found some difficulty in judging between them."

Three ! Maggie's must be one ; Gracie's, another ; but whose could the third be ? The children looked from one to another in surprise.

"The one called 'The Angel's Wanderings,'" said Mr Ashton, "contains a great deal of poetry and originality ;"—some of the little ones wondered what that long word meant—and the royal

eyes peeped up from under the royal eyelashes, half-shyly, half-delighted,—oh ! was it really coming to her ?—“ but the other two of which I have spoken excel it in some respects. These are ‘ Christmas Holydays,’ and ‘ A Sunday Walk ;’ and this last, written by Miss Nellie Ransom, I have decided, on the whole, to be the most worthy of the prize. The neatness and care with which this paper has been copied and presented have gone some way in fixing a choice which was somewhat difficult. Miss Nellie Ransom, my dear.”

Nellie Ransom ! studious, painstaking, but not remarkably clever Nellie, whom not one in the school had ever thought of as the winner of the prize. Even Miss Ashton was rather surprised, though she knew better what Nellie could do than any of her schoolmates did ; but no one was more astonished than the modest little girl herself.

Mr Ashton repeated her name more than once, while she sat still in mute amazement ; and, even then, she had to be urged forward by the little girls on either side of her.

“ Don’t you hear, Nellie ? Go, Nellie. The prize is for you ; go take it, Nellie,” was whispered around her before she could collect herself

sufficiently to go up and receive the desk from Mr Ashton's hands.

To describe Gracie's astonishment and indignation would be quite impossible. The pretty reward she had already won had no longer any charm in her eyes, since that she had regarded as her own was lost to her. And after all her boasting! Tears of mortification and disappointment welled up to her eyes, and would not be kept back; and an angry sob, and a murmur of "It's not fair; mine was the best!" broke from her.

"Now," said Mr Ashton, "we are to bestow what I consider the first prize of the day. You all know what that is; this paper, which will give to her who wins it, by the choice of her schoolmates, the power of doing good to some crippled child. This choice, I trust, will be made fairly and honestly, without partiality. I want it given to the young lady who you all feel most truly deserves it, though she may not perhaps be the one for whom you care most. All you little ones understand me, do you not? Now, will each one write upon a slip of paper the name of the girl to whom her vote is given, and we will see who has the greatest number."

Twenty heads were presently bent over as many slips of paper; but directly Bessie rose to her feet, and stood looking at Miss Ashton as if she wished permission to speak.

"Well, Bessie, what is it?" asked the young lady, wondering what was coming now, as she saw the grave, earnest face of the little girl.

"Miss Ashton," said Bessie, "I really do think my Maggie is the best, but I'm 'fraid I do feel *partialitied* to her. I couldn't help it, you know. Does it make any difference about my voting for her?"

Miss Ashton smiled, and looked at her uncle, who smiled also, and answered for her.

"None at all, little one. If you really think your Maggie deserves the prize, vote for her, by all means. I'll answer for it that your love for her makes her none the less worthy."

"Thank you, sir," answered Bessie, demurely: and she sat down again, and, with great satisfaction, wrote Maggie's name in the largest possible letters.

The business of writing the names did not take long, for every girl had long since made up her mind for whom she should vote. Belle Powers was sent to collect the slips of paper,

and brought them to Mr Ashton, who, with his niece, looked over them.

"There does not seem to be much difference of opinion," he said, smiling again. "One for Maggie Bradford, four for Belle Powers, and fifteen for Bessie Bradford. My little girl, the hospital bed is yours, to give to whom you will. If you know of any child to whom it will be a help and comfort, you have also the satisfaction of knowing that you have gained it for him by your own good conduct, and the love and approbation of your schoolmates."

If Nellie had been surprised, Bessie was certainly no less so. She could scarcely believe her own ears. The hospital bed her own, to give to lame Jemmy! It seemed too good to be true. She had had a strong hope that dear little Belle would gain it; and Belle, as you know, had promised that Jemmy should have it, if it fell to her; but that she, Bessie, should be the chosen one, and that by fifteen votes!—she could not understand it.

With a flush upon her cheek, but still with a quiet, simple dignity very different from Gracie's air of supreme self-satisfaction, she rose and went forward to Mr Ashton.

"My dear little girl," said the gentleman, looking down kindly upon her, "from what I have heard I believe that the choice of your schoolmates has been justly made. You have looked only to the honour of God, and tried most earnestly to 'do the thing that is right;' and God has said, 'Them that honour me, I will honour.' May He bless you, and keep you always in His own way."

Bessie took the folded paper he held out to her, and answered, "Thank you very much, sir, and lame Jemmy will thank you very much too. He is a very good, patient boy."

"I daresay," replied Mr Ashton; "but he has to thank you, not me."

Bessie gave him another grateful glance, and turned to go back to her seat; but as she did so, she caught Kate Maynard's roguish eyes fixed upon her, their mischief softened by an expression of tender pride and congratulation, which told her that the young lady was nearly as well pleased as herself.

"Oh, Katie!" she exclaimed, standing where she was, and forgetting for the moment that every one in the room was watching her; then turning towards her mother, and meeting her

dear look of loving sympathy, all that was in her little heart proved too much for her, and dropping the paper, she ran swiftly across the room, and buried her head in mamma's lap. How much there was in that "Oh, Katie!" perhaps Kate herself only knew; and although she joined in the smile which passed around, the laughing eyes were suddenly dimmed, and her hand went up to dash away one or two very suspicious-looking drops.

This last little performance on Bessie's part was not in the programme, and rather out of rule, to be sure; but as the exercises of the day were now over, it did not so much matter.

Mamma's gentle soothing soon calmed her over-excitement, and there was Maggie, with her arms about her neck, whispering, "Bessie, I don't mind a bit about the composition prize now. I'd rather than anything that you would have this. And I'm so glad for lame Jemmy."

"Yes," said Bessie; "it was so good of the girls."

"No, it wasn't," said Belle, who was holding fast to her father's hand, and jumping up and down in an ecstasy of delight at Bessie's success; "no, it wasn't. They couldn't help it, not if

they wrote the truf, and Mrs Ashton said they must. And, Bessie, do you know the reason you had so many votes, was 'cause all the big young ladies wrote your name; every one in that class. Miss Ashton just told papa so. It's very nice to have so many give it to you, Bessie: is it not?"

Nice! Bessie thought so indeed! A happier child could not have been found than she was, as she sat with her head leaning upon her mother's breast, wearing a face of such perfect content. She had her reward indeed, not only a heart at peace with God and man, but also the longed-for gift for the crippled boy. Had she given way in that moment of temptation, it could not have come to her fairly; and where, oh! where would have been the first?

She had nothing more to wish for now.

Smiles, kisses, and congratulations were showered upon her, every one seemed to be so glad for her; and she thought it quite strange, but very pleasant, that so many people who did not know Jemmy should feel such an interest in his good fortune.

And there was Maggie, dear, unselfish Maggie, full of eager sympathy, and rejoicing in her joy.

"My disappointment is quite made up in this, Bessie," she said. "It makes so many more people happy than my having the desk would have done, and it will do Jemmy so much good. And then you know Nellie does not have half so many nice things as we do, so it is better for her to have it. She has not done being surprised yet: it was such a very unexpected blow to her that she can hardly believe it; but she is so happy about it, I couldn't help telling her I was glad for her."

"Little honey-bee, that takes all the sweet and leaves all the bitter!" said Colonel Rush, as he drew Maggie fondly towards him. "But what is our 'angel' going to say to all this? I am afraid she will feel that the 'subject' has not met with proper consideration."

"The 'subject' is too little to know now," said sunshiny Maggie; "and when she is bigger we won't tell her anything about it."

"Indeed we will," said the Colonel, pushing back Maggie's curls from beneath the crown of lilies. "I shall tell her the whole story."

"I wouldn't," said Maggie; "she might have feelings about it."

"I hope she will, if they are of the proper

kind," said the Colonel, laughing; "and I should not be surprised if she had some opinions to express even now."

Maggie wondered what he meant; but just then some of the children spoke to her, and she forgot his words, to remember them another time.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in amusing themselves in various ways; the May queen being throned and carried in state about house and garden; but she proved restive under this, and, as Kate said, "set a very undignified example to her subjects," by escaping from their hands, and insisting on racing and jumping upon her own nimble little feet. None who saw how joyous and merry she was, how free from every selfish thought and envious feeling, would have imagined that there had been a time when she had been *too* anxious for this prize which had, at last, fallen to another; that she had said and felt that she could never bear the disappointment of losing it. A contrast she was to Gracie, certainly, who could enjoy none of the pleasures offered to her because she had not gained that on which she had set her heart, looking, not for God's approval, but for that of man, and her own honour and glory.

XV.

A LETTER.

ON Saturday, Mr and Mrs Bradford drove out to Riverside, taking Maggie and Bessie with them.

So eager were the children to carry the good news to Jemmy Bent and his mother, that their parents thought it as well to go on to the cottage by the creek at once, knowing that the little girls could take small thought or enjoyment in anything else till this business was settled; therefore James was told to drive there first, instead of turning in at Grandpapa Duncan's gate.

The cottage looked rather neater and more comfortable than it did two years ago, when Maggie and Bessie first went there to see lame Jemmy. Mary was older and stronger, and could do more work, and it was her pride to keep things as tidy as possible around her brother. He looked quite at his ease, sitting in his wheeled chair, which stood on the grass plat


in front of the little house ; and as the carriage stopped at the gate, his pale face lighted up with surprise and pleasure when he saw whom it contained. A visit from any of Mr Bradford's or Mr Duncan's family was a treat to Jemmy in more ways than one.

Mrs Bent was at home, and asked the visitors to step in ; but Mrs Bradford said they would rather stay outside for the few moments they could remain.

After asking how Jemmy was, and how he enjoyed the lovely weather, Mr Bradford told for what purpose they had come—to bring to Jemmy the ticket of admission to the hospital, with all its comforts, and the possibility, even *probability*, of his being so far cured as to enable him to walk with crutches or a cane.

Maggie had imagined that Mrs Bent and her children would be overwhelmed with delight and gratitude, and had that morning pleased herself and Bessie by describing the scene which she supposed would take place.

“ Their emotions will be quite too much for them, Bessie,” she had said ; “ at least they ought to be, and I suppose they will, for that's always the way in things you read about. They'll



be so full of surprise and joy and gratitude they won't know what to do with themselves."

But to the astonishment and indignation of both children, especially of Maggie, Mrs Bent's "emotions" took quite a different turn from what they had expected. She burst into tears, and wrung her hands, exclaiming, "Oh, sir, I never could, no, never could! To send my poor boy away from me! Oh, no, sir! no, indeed! And to one of them hospitals too! I'd never do it—not if I work my fingers to the bone."

And Mary, seeing her mother so excited, began to cry too at the thought of parting with the brother who had been such a care to her for so long; while poor Jemmy, who had felt grateful and pleased beyond measure at the prospect of receiving such care and help as would make him less helplessly crippled than he was now, gazed at his mother in dismay; and our little girls stood looking on, thoroughly crestfallen and disappointed at this reception of their offer.

"Mrs Bent," said Mrs Bradford, kindly, "I know it seems hard for you to part from your helpless boy, even for a time; but surely you will not refuse to let him go when you think of *the benefit* it will be to him. Could you not bear

this lesser sorrow for the sake of seeing Jemmy able to move about by himself? You can see him now and then; I will myself take care that you have the means to reach him; and in a year or so, perhaps less, he may come back to you, able to do something for himself, it may be even to be a help to you. I am sure he has the will for that, if he had but the way and the strength. Is it not so, Jemmy?"

Jemmy smiled, and put out his poor thin hand gratefully to the lady; then broke forth—

"O mother! let me go, do let me go! Oh! if you knew what it was to lie here! I do try to be patient, and I'm willing to stay so if the Lord thinks it best; but sure He's sent us this hope, and you won't throw it away. Say you won't, mother, and let me try; and, oh! do thank the dear lady and gentleman and the little ladies!"

"Let me speak to you a moment, Mrs Bent," said Mr Bradford; and calling her aside, he showed her all the advantage the place would be to Jemmy, and soon talked her into a more reasonable and gentle mood, while Mrs Bradford spoke cheerfully to Jemmy and his sister of all the comforts and pleasures which would

be furnished for him in this refuge for such poor crippled children as he.

No fear about Jemmy. He was eager enough about it to satisfy the children, and Mary, too, could not now be sufficiently grateful for the care and kindness offered to her brother.

"You'll please to excuse me, ma'am," said Mrs Bent, coming back; "and I see now it's kindness itself in the dear little ladies that have been such good friends to my boy from the first, and a great blessing for him; but at the first, it seemed cruel like to send him from me, and as if I was willing to be rid of him."

So it was talked of a little more, and the arrangements made for moving Jemmy to the hospital in a few days when the place would be vacant and ready for him. By the time this was done, Mrs Bent could look at the thing in its proper light, and was profuse enough of thanks and blessings. But the first impression was not readily done away with; and when they left, Bessie took her seat in the carriage with a very sober face; and Maggie, who was highly disgusted with Mrs Bent, broke forth with some opinions by no means complimentary to that good woman.

"Well," said Grandpapa Duncan, when he had heard all about the prizes, and the visit to Jemmy, "I am sure our lame boy will say that your going to school has been a great blessing to him, since it has brought this about."

"Why, yes," said Maggie, thoughtfully, "so it has. I'm sure I'd never have thought our going to school could be of use to Jemmy. Doesn't it seem queer, grandpapa? But it was all Bessie. I'd *never* have earned that prize."

"Yes, she would, grandpapa," said Bessie. "Miss Kate told me so yesterday. She said if they had not voted for me, all the large class would have voted for Maggie, 'cause they thought she was so true and good about Gracie's composition; so I told Maggie this morning it was just as much her present to Jemmy as mine. And we always like to be halves in things, grandpapa. And I told Miss Kate, Maggie deserved it more than me, 'cause I was very tempted about the composition, and she was not one bit."

"But she knew better than that, and I'm glad of it," said Maggie, with a decided nod of her curly head.

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"She didn't say so," replied her sister: "only said, 'O Bessie!' and just kissed me."

"There's a letter and a large parcel for Maggie on the library-table," said Patrick, "they reached home that afternoon."

"A letter for me? Oh, lovely!" said Maggie, and away she ran with Bessie after her, eager to see what the parcel contained, whom the letter was from.

The parcel was a large one, carefully wrapped up, and the letter lay upon it.

"Why! that's Uncle Horace's monogram! What can he be writing to me about what he saw me yesterday, and will see me again tomorrow? I just expect this is another of those lovely surprises, the dear, precious lamb!" Maggie, who, provided an epithet came handy, was not always particular as to how it fitted. "Let's open the parcel first."

No sooner said than done; and when opened it was found to contain a rosewood writing-table, the very counterpart of the one given yesterday by Mr Ashton to Nellie Ransom. The children at first took it to be the very same.

"Why, it's Nellie's prize!" exclaimed Maggie.

"Was there a mistake about it, and did

like your composition the best after all, and send it to you, I wonder?" said Bessie.

"If they did, I wouldn't take it now," said Maggie: "it would be too mean to Nellie. But let's see what Uncle Horace says."

The letter was quickly unsealed, and there appeared a long line of verses. Maggie was in too much of a hurry to try and make out for herself Colonel Rush's rather illegible handwriting, and she rushed with it to her father.

"Papa, papa! please read it for us. May Bessie's name is at the end of all this lot of po'try, but we know very well her papa made it up; and we are in such a hurry to know about the desk. Please read it for us."

Papa took the letter, and read aloud the following verses:—

"My dear cousin Maggie,—for 'cousin' you are,
Since your 'uncle' and 'aunt' my papa and mamma,—
You will be much surprised when this letter you see,
To find that it comes from a 'subject' like me.

"But papa and mamma—I have heard 'Love is blind'—
Declare I've a very remarkable mind;
That I'm 'lovely' and 'perfect,' I'm 'brilliant' and
'wise,'
That I'm really a 'wonderful child of her size.'

" Mamma sits by my cradle, and murmurs these things
In the pauses of all the sweet songs that she sings ;
While into the pillow I nestle my head,
And smile with approval at all that is said.

" Then she says ' sister-angels are whispering to me.'
Who besides her sweet self? for papa it can't be ;
No ' angel ' is he. I can't quite make *him* out.
Of mamma and myself, you'll perceive, I've no doubt.

" Your prize composition, *I* think very fine,
And I'm a good judge, you'll allow, Maggie mine :
Your ' subject ' well chosen ; ideas well express'd ;
To my baby-notions 'tis clearly the best.

" But on one point, dear Maggie, you make a mistake ;
Your faith in my father I rudely must shake.
You call this same soldier the ' bravest of braves,'
Now listen, and hear how this Colonel behaves.

" Whene'er I determine to take a good cry,—
A most innocent treat when no strangers are nigh,—
Why ! what does this hero of so many fields,
But snatch up his cane, and then take to his heels.

" ' What a coward ! ' you'll say. Yes, indeed, 'tis most
strange ;
For whene'er I do cry, it is but for a change ;
One cannot be cooing and smiling all day,
Sometimes I have tried that, but find it don't pay.

" But one thing, dear Maggie, you've made very clear,
That I am 'an angel' doth plainly appear ;
Then mamma says the same, and I know you're both
true :
I believe it myself,—between me and you.

" Excuse my bad grammar, I must make the rhyme,
I'll do better some day if you'll but give me time ;
And as for my manners, I'm sure that I mean
Not the least disrespect to our little May queen.

" Yes, I fully believe such a ' treasure ' as I
Must have flown from some spot very near to the sky ;
And I know gentle spirits *do* whisper to me,
And teach me sweet lessons of what I must be.

" They tell me I must be a good little child,
A baby obedient, patient, and mild ;
They tell me to love all the good and the true,
And therefore, dear Maggie, I have to love you.

" And Bessie, the darling ! she, too, has some claims
For her own precious sake, to say nothing of names.
My own sweet '*example*' she says she will be :
They tell me to profit by what I may see.

" But now let's to business. I think you approve
Of doing kind 'favours' for those whom we love ;
And if they deserve it, why, so much the better,
For here is the gist of this wonderful letter.

" I must own, my dear cousin, I thought it a shame
This prize for fine writing fell not to your name.
In the judge's decision, I can't quite agree,
So, dear little maiden, it seemeth to me

" That your ' subject ' herself should do what she can :
And after some thought, I have hit on this plan :
To send you this prize for the story you tell
Of the ' angel ' who loves you so truly and well.

" But remember, my darling, you always will find
That a heart that is generous, truthful, and kind,
Where self and deceit and envyings hard
No entrance can find, is its own best reward.

" And the smile of the Shepherd, who dwells up above,
And watches His lambs with the tenderest love,
Will always be ours when the victory we win,
By the help of His grace in the conflict with sin.

" And now this long letter I 'll bring to a close,
The thought it has cost me, oh, nobody knows !
With much love to yourself, and to Bessie the same,
I 'll say no more, Maggie, but just sign my name.

" Your ' subject,'

MAY BESSIE."

Maggie went into ecstasies of delight over this letter, as well as over the beautiful gift which accompanied it ; but Bessie, although she shared to the full her sister's pleasure in the latter, could

not be persuaded to say she thought the verses so very fine.

"Why, what's the matter with it?" said Maggie. "I think it's lovely."

"I don't think it's so very nice," answered Bessie, gravely regarding the letter with an air of comic displeasure.

"Well," said Maggie, "maybe it's not so very po'try, but it jingle-jangles so nicely. I wish you would like it."

"I do like what it says about you and May Bessie," said Bessie; "but it's not nice about my soldier at all. He's not a coward."

"Oh! that's only for fun," said Maggie. "You know that it's only *pretend* that May Bessie wrote it. The Colonel did it himself; and he always does run away when the baby cries."

"Yes," said matter-of-fact Bessie, half unwilling to admit even so much against her hero; "but that does not make him a coward. But, Maggie darling, I couldn't speak about how glad I am that this very lovely surprise has come to you. And I think this is better than if you had the real prize in school."

"Oh, yes! a great deal better," said Maggie. "Mr Ashton is very good and kind; but then

he is not any one of ours, and it's a great deal more pleasure to have a prize from our own May Bessie than from him. And besides, Bessie, I don't know how I *could* have walked up, and taken it before all those people. Sometimes, I thought I would almost rather not have the prize than do that."

But if the letter was not altogether to Bessie's satisfaction, the desk certainly proved so; and it was long before she and Maggie tired of examining it and its complete fitting out. The first use Maggie made of it, was to answer May Bessie's letter, which she did in rhyme, rather halting rhyme it was now and then, to be sure; but she and Bessie were satisfied that it was a gem of poetry; and as the baby found no fault with it, we must take it for granted that she thought so also.

It was delightful, too, to see how pleased all the school-girls, large and small, were to hear of Maggie's good fortune, and to read the letter from May Bessie, which she permitted them all to see.

"Miss Kate," said Maggie, looking up into the laughing eyes which were no longer a terror to her, "it's very kind of you to be so glad for me."

"Do you think so?" said Kate. "I am truly glad for you, Maggie. We are better friends than we used to be, are we not?"

"Oh, yes!" said Maggie; "partly 'cause I'm not so shy as I used to be, and partly 'cause you have improved a good deal in doing unto others. You do not tease half so much as you used to, Miss Kate."

"Thank you for the compliment," said Kate, laughing, and tossing Maggie's long curls about her face till they covered it as with a veil.

"Maybe Miss Kate wanted the best girl prize, and knew she would not have any chance if she teased so much," said Belle.

"Much chance I'd have of 'the best girl prize,' as you call it," said Kate. "No, Belle: I never set myself up for that."

"But you ought, oughtn't you?" said Belle, with solemn gravity.

"Ought what?" asked Kate. "To be the best girl in the school?"

"No," answered the child; "but to try to be."

"And take the prize from your Bessie!" said Kate, pretending to be shocked at the idea.

"No," said Belle, who sometimes presumed on being a privileged character, and said things to

the older girls which none of the other little ones would have dared to say. "No, Miss Kate, I don't think there's goodness enough in you for *that*. But you might try to be the best that you could."

"What would be the good when there was no chance of the prize?" asked Kate, much amused.

"To please Jesus," said Belle. "Bessie's mamma told us about that, that time I lived there while papa was away. She said we must only try to do the thing that was right, 'cause it *was* right, no matter what people thought of us; not to try to be or to do the best so as to be rewarded."

"Well done, little Belle," said Fanny Berry; "how nicely you have remembered and repeated your lesson!"

"But I didn't always remember to do it," said Belle; "not that time I climbed on the wall. I made believe in my heart I was not doing anything naughty; but myself knew I was, and God knew I was too; and so He gave me good enough for me."

The girls laughed.

"Bessie always keeps the truf in her heart,"

said Belle, looking fondly after her little friend who had run into the other room to tell Miss Ashton about Maggie's gift; "and I think that's the reason she always keeps it in her living."

"Yes," said Julia Grafton; "that is it."

"I think we've all improved a little over these prizes," said Maggie.

"'Cept only Gracie," said Belle; "she's disimproved very much. She is not half so nice as she used to be."

"But we won't remember the faults of others now," said Miss Ashton, who just then came back with Bessie to congratulate Maggie. "I am glad to say that I think more good than harm has come from these prizes, though I feared at first it might be the contrary. I think with Maggie that almost all have improved, some in one way, some in another. Lessons have been learned by us, which were not learned in books; and I am thankful that little, if any, jealousy, unkindness, or hard feeling has arisen among you; and that a true generosity and willingness for the success of others have been shown in more than one instance. I was a little doubtful of the plan when my uncle first

proposed it; but it has really been of service in more ways than one."

"Mamma said it would do us no harm to try for those things, if we did not let ourselves become too anxious," said Maggie.

"No," said Miss Ashton, "not so long as we do so from a right motive, and remember that the praise of God is more to be desired than the praise of man. He has said, 'Those that honour Him, He will honour;' and I think we have proved it so here in school."

This was the last day of school for our Maggie and Bessie; and sorry as they were to leave their kind teachers and pleasant companions, they were delighted at the thought of all the pleasure promised to them this coming summer, and at the hope of having mamma give them lessons again in the autumn.

They were first to spend a few days at Riverside, going there with Uncle Ruthven and Aunt Bessie; and a little later were to travel with papa and mamma, winding up the summer at dear old Chalecoo, where they had already passed one such pleasant season. Such visions of wonder and delight danced before their minds; such "adventures" as Maggie expected to meet

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with, furnishing "subjects" for endless compositions, to say nothing of the continued history of the "Complete Family;" such plans for the help and comfort of dear mamma, who had said she was sure this trip, undertaken for her good, would be of a great deal more service to her if she were allowed to have her little girls with her; such letters as they were to write to console those who were left behind; why, there was no end to them all; and fast as the little tongues were accustomed to chatter, Maggie declared that the days were not half long enough for all the thinking and talking they had to do now.

And now, like their schoolmates, we must say good-bye to Maggie and Bessie; and I hope you have found that earning her prize was not the only or the holiest work for her Master done by our Bessie at School.

THE END.



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